

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second-Class Matter at the New York Post Office, November 7, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

No. 421.

NEW YORK, JUNE 27, 1906.

Price 5 Cents.

EDGEWOOD No 2; OR THE ONLY BOY IN THE FIRE COMPANY. By EX-FIRE-CHIEF WARDEN.



The splendid engine went down, throwing one of the firemen to the pavement with such force as to break his arm. The driver fell forward on his face and lay like one dead.

"What's the matter?" cried Burt.

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EDGEWOOD No. 2

OR,

The Only Boy in the Fire Company

By EX-FIRE-CHIEF WARDEN.

CHAPTER I.

"THE ONLY BOY IN THE COMPANY."

It was on a very dark night, and a drizzling rain was falling, when the great signal firebell of Edgewood rang out an alarm. The engine for that section of the town hurried to the scene of conflagration. The red glare in the terrible gloom of the night told but too plainly where it was. Five minutes later a second and general alarm was given, and the other three companies of the bustling little city quickly responded to the call.

People who heard the signals knew that a great conflagration was threatened, and many put on overcoats, seized umbrellas, and hastened to the scene of danger to find that an entire business block in the lower end of the city was in peril.

Edgewood No. 1 was the first to reach the fire. No. 2 and the Citizens' No. 1 followed on the second call, while the Annex Fire Company from the extreme upper part of the city, some three miles away, was the last on the ground.

Fire-Chief Crane was there to watch and direct the firemen. He was uneasy over the fact that the entire block was built of framework. Not a brick house on the short street.

In the upper story of every store lived a family—some had two or more—and the rapid spread of the flames seemed to presage an awful loss of life among women and children.

"Up with the ladders!" came through every foreman's trumpet.

"Save me! Save me!" came in screams from many windows.

No. 2 was in front of Ross' grocery store, and two families lived in the two stories above it. Terrified women screamed for help from the windows. Escape by the stairway was cut off.

Dan Truman and Joe Hulsey sprang up a ladder to their rescue. Dan was foreman of No. 2, as brave a fireman as ever lived, and Joe was a private in the company. Both entered a

window, and just a few seconds later an explosion was heard. A dense volume of flame and smoke shot out of that same window, telling the awful truth as to the location.

A cry of horror went up from firemen and spectators, for all believed the two brave firemen to be doomed, if not instantly killed.

Suddenly one of the youngest firemen in the company, a lithe, active youth of nineteen, sprang forward, and ran up the ladder like a squirrel.

"Call that man down!" cried the chief from his cart.

"Come back! Come back!" yelled a score of firemen.

"Come back! Come back!" sung out a hundred voices among the spectators.

But the youth ran up, and fairly tumbled into the room, right in the teeth of the red flame.

"The man is crazy and doomed!" cried the chief. "Two of you stand there and let no more go up! Keep the stream there a little longer! Who was that boy, Howard?"

A fireman standing nearest the cart of the chief, sang out:

"He is Burt Briggs!"

"There he is! There he is!" cried hundreds of men in the crowd as the form of the youth was dimly seen at the window.

The chief glared up at the window, and saw him climbing out with another man in his arms.

"Up, men, and help him!" he yelled.

Two firemen dashed up the ladder and relieved him of his burden.

But no sooner was he relieved of his rescue than he disappeared again.

The crowd held their breath in a horrible suspense, while the two other firemen came down the ladder with Dan Truman, who was unconscious.

"It's Dan!" exclaimed a dozen at once, as the foreman was recognized.

"He's hurt!"

"He's dead!"

"Take him away!" cried the chief.

"There he is again! Help him!"

Again two firemen ran up the ladder to assist the young hero in the seething cauldron of flame, and this time he had Joe Hulsey in his arms.

A great cheer went up from the firemen and spectators. But ere the sound of the cheering died away the daring young fireman the third time disappeared from sight.

"He is fire-proof!" cried a voice in the crowd.

"He is doomed!" yelled others.

"No man can live in that blaze!"

"There he is—at the other window!"

The crowd gazed up and saw him at the window to the right of the ladder, and a frenzied shout of:

"Save him! Save him!" went up like a roar from an angry sea. Lives were being saved by other firemen in the two buildings adjoining, but nobody seemed to know the fact. Every eye was on the young hero who seemed to move about in the midst of the fierce flames as though they were but gentle zephyrs that fanned his cheeks.

"The ladder! The ladder!" screamed a thousand voices in the excited crowd. "He is going to jump!"

He held a little two-year-old child in his arms as he tried to climb out of the window, and half a dozen brave firemen rushed forward to catch them should they fall.

Suddenly he let go the babe, and it went down through a dense cloud of smoke issuing from a lower window, landing unhurt in the arms of one of the firemen. Just a moment later he fell himself, limp and unconscious. But two of his comrades broke his fall with their strong arms, and bore him quickly through the crowd to the other side of the street, followed by the wildest cheering ever heard in the town.

The fire chief stood up in his cart and sung out:

"That boy is the bravest of the brave among firemen!"

The police drove back the crowd and took charge of the wounded firemen in order to let the others go back to their posts. Dan Truman, still unconscious, was just being placed in an ambulance, when the young fireman was brought over from the scene of his daring exploits. Joe Hulsey had recovered consciousness, but was too badly hurt to know much about what was going on around him. All three were placed in the ambulance and driven away to the hospital.

Nearly all night long the brave firemen fought the fierce flames inch by inch, and succeeded in saving the block after losing three houses. It was marvelous work, to say the least, for every house was a tinder box, every one being dry as powder and almost as inflammable. The rain had begun just a little while before the fire broke out, and even then it was but a thin drizzle.

As it was several lives were lost in the house where the explosion took place.

But let us follow the brave firemen to the hospital, and see what had befallen them.

The surgeons in charge found that Foreman Dan Truman had a broken leg, Hulsey had two ribs broken, and young Burt Briggs badly burned in a dozen places, to say nothing of internal injuries from inhaling fire and smoke.

As soon as he saw the fire under control, the chief drove to the hospital to inquire after the injured firemen. Only Hulsey was able to talk, and all he could say was that soon after he and the foreman had entered the building he heard an explosion, felt himself blown violently against the wall, and then fell unconscious. "I don't even know how I got out," he added.

"You owe your life to Burt Briggs," the chief said to him.

"What! The only boy in the company!"

"Yes, and about the best man in the entire fire department."

Hulsey was astonished, and asked:

"How did he do it?"

The chief explained how not only he and the foreman, but a little two-year-old baby boy had been saved by the daring youth.

"And he is very badly hurt himself," Crame remarked. "It is a marvel how he escaped at all."

"Yes. I actually saw him standing for a brief moment, within a solid sheet of flame," added the chief. "How he escaped alive passes my comprehension. But then I don't know that he will live. He is still unconscious, and the doctors can't tell yet whether or not he can survive. Do you have any idea as to the cause of the explosion in the rooms up there?"

"None whatever. When we entered through the window the smell of burning cotton was the strongest odor we met, coming, no doubt, from burning clothes, quilts, curtains, and such things."

"Yes, yes! I guess you are right. I'll see if any of the family escaped, and question them about it. Hope you may soon get over your hurts," and with that the chief took leave of him and went away.

CHAPTER II.

BURT BRIGGS.

Burt Briggs was a native of Edgewood, and lived in a little narrow street on the west side, in a small, white, four-roomed cottage, with his widowed mother. He was a very quiet sort of youth, with a common school education, such as ~~was~~ had in the public schools of the town. At the time of the opening of our story his father had been dead about four years. His life insurance of \$2,000 was all he had to leave his widow and son. That she quickly invested in a home to save rent. After that she and Burt earned their living, she by sewing and he as a house painter—the same trade his father followed.

About six months previous to the opening of this story he was persuaded to join Edgewood No. 2 Fire Company. All the members were grown men—all married but four. He joined that particular company because its engine house was but two blocks away from his humble home, hence would be within easy reach when the great fire bell called him to duty.

Dan Truman, the foreman of the company, was also a painter, and had been the one intimate friend of Burt's father. Sometimes when in need of an extra hand, Truman would send for Burt, and would keep him at work as long as he could. The lad always did his work well, but was of a very quiet disposition. He preferred to take a book and read to playing any game or talking with his acquaintances.

In a bustling, growing, enterprising town like Edgewood a silent, plodding youth remains unnoticed, and so it was with Burt Briggs. But his mother noticed that in all times his first thought and care was for her. He looked after her comfort as though she was an invalid instead of a strong, healthy handsome widow of forty.

Burt was at home preparing to retire for the night when the clang of the great fire-bell startled him. He sprang up and listened to the strokes to ascertain what district the fire was in.

"Ah! it's downtown," he said, and again prepared to turn in for the night. Just as he rolled himself comfortably in bed, the clanging of the great bell caused him to spring out, as though he had found a rattlesnake in there.

"It's a general call," he exclaimed, donning a fireman's hat and red shirt.

Mrs. Briggs ran to his door just as he dashed out of his room, and asked,

"What does it mean, Burt?"

"It means a big fire!" and the next moment he was off like a rocket.

Standing on the little stoop in the rear of her home, the anxious mother gazed long at the red glare so vivid against the blackness of the night, wondering if her boy was in danger. Hour after hour passed, and still the red glare was there, and brilliant sparks flew up toward the dark clouds. When the explosion came, she heard it, but indistinctly at that distance; but she noticed the immense cloud of sparks that went up above the conflagration.

One of her neighbors came home late, and she heard them talking on their back stoop. Her mother love prompted her to call out and ask:

"Is anyone hurt?"

"They all think some women and children have perished in the fire," replied the wife of a neighbor. "Isn't it awful?"

"Yes, indeed! Are any firemen injured?"

"I don't know—there's such a big crowd there," the man replied. "You had better go to bed, as the fireman will have to work all night to prevent the flames from spreading."

She went in and shut the door. When she retired she left a light burning for Burt, and some lunch on the table in the dining room.

When she awoke it was daylight, and the lamp in the hall was still burning as she had left it the night before.

Her heart almost ceased to beat, and all the color left her cheeks. She was about to sink down on the floor, when a knocking on the front door recalled her to herself.

She ran to the door and opened it.

There stood Nannie Truman, the sixteen-year-old daughter of the brave foreman of No. 2.

"Oh, Mrs. Briggs!" cried Nannie, darting in and clasping the widow's hand in both hers. "Papa is in the hospital with a broken leg, and Burt is with him. Mother wants you to go with her to see him."

"Nannie, is my Burt hurt?" the widow asked, huskily.

"Oh, they say Burt saved papa's life," replied Nannie. "Do come—quick! Mother is waiting for you. I have to stay with the children," and so the cool-headed girl evaded the question the anxious mother had asked her.

The widow hurriedly donned bonnet and wrap, and accompanied the young girl to her home. Joining Mrs. Truman, the two hastened away to the hospital in the gray dawn of the morning.

They were at once admitted to the ward, where the three injured firemen were. Truman and Hulsey were in full possession of their faculties. Burt Briggs was still unconscious. Mrs. Truman ran to her husband and knelt by his cot. Mrs. Briggs glanced round the room, and saw Burt lying almost as one dead.

With a face white as death, she went to him and looked at him in silence, the two doctors by her side. She did not utter a word.

"He is badly burned, but will get over it, madam," the elder physician said to her.

"Burt!" she suddenly called out.

He sprang up and exclaimed:

"Look out down there! Catch this child!"

Then he fell back on the cot and lay still as death.

"He saved a little baby boy," called out Hulsey from his cot.

"He saved my life, too," sung out Dan Truman.

"And mine also," added Hulsey.

Mrs. Briggs dropped on her knees, buried her face on the pillow, and burst into tears.

Mrs. Truman sprang up and ran to her side. Just as she reached her Burt suddenly opened his eyes, looked round him for a moment or two, and then said:

"Water! Give me some water!"

"Ah! He is himself again!" exclaimed the physician, promptly giving him a glass of water.

Burt drank the water and then saw his mother.

"Mother, I am badly roasted," he said to her, as he laid back on the cot, "but I'm afraid poor Dan Truman is burned up."

"Not much, I ain't, Burt, old boy!" sung out Dan. "You got me out all right, and I won't forget it. Sorry you got scorched, though!"

Burt sat up and glared over at Dan on his cot.

"We are both scorched then!" he said, "and Hulsey, too. It was a hot place—hottest I was ever in."

"Burt, are you in much pain?" his mother asked him.

"Yes, mother," and he laid back on the cot with a sigh.

"We'll soon relieve that, my boy," said the doctor, "and you'll be all right in a little while."

"Oh, I don't mind it as long as I saved Dan and the others. Nannie and her mother couldn't do without him, you know. Nannie loves her father as her life," and he closed his eyes and turned his face to the wall.

The eyes of the two mothers met. The next moment they were clasped in each others' arms. Each knew what was in the other's heart, but not a word passed their lips about it.

They both went over to Dan Truman's cot. The foreman caught the widow's hand in both his, and said:

"I owe my life to Burt. I shall ever be as a father to him. He showed the qualities of a hero last night."

"That's just what he is!" exclaimed Hulsey.

When the two mothers returned home a few hours later they found the praises of Burt Briggs in everybody's mouth. His daring rescue and own marvelous escape was the sole topic. One paper said he was a silent hero, having been four years the sole support of a widowed mother, and had never spoken of it.

Before noon the little cottage of the Widow Briggs could hardly hold the good things that were sent there and dumped on the piazza. She tried to stop it, but in vain.

"You can't help yourself, ma'am," said an honest old grocer, as he rolled a barrel of flour up on the piazza, "an' what's more I'm glad you can't. That boy can't do any work just now, an' we are just sorter making it easy like for both of you, an'—an'—God bless both of you!" and he turned quickly away, blowing his nose very suspiciously.

Before the day closed more provisions had been sent to Mrs. Briggs than she and Burt could consume in six months, and she then knew that the terrible sacrifice her brave boy had made was appreciated by all the people of Edgewood. It was gratifying to a fond mother's pride, yet it did not relieve her anxiety as to his sufferings from the injuries he had received.

CHAPTER III.

THE CROSS OF GOLD.

The fire proved to be a disastrous one in the matter of human life. Five lives were lost—three in the house where the explosion took place, and two on the floor above. The little baby boy, whom Burt Briggs saved, was the only one of his

family who escaped alive, his parents and an elder sister perishing in the flames. Strange to say, the child had received but little injury. The neighbors said his name was Jimmie Heard. He was sent to the hospital to be cared for temporarily by the matron there.

In the meantime, the members of No. 2 held a meeting at their engine-house to elect a new foreman. Dan Truman sent a letter to them, in which he said "a man with a broken leg is a poor fireman, hence I resign the post of foreman of No. 2, with the suggestion that you immediately accept it, and elect another to fill the position."

The resignation was accepted as a matter of course. A foreman was an absolute necessity, and so an election was announced to take place in one week from that night—which would be seventeen days after the fire.

Three members at once announced themselves as candidates for the place, and a vigorous canvassing for votes began.

Ten days after the fire Dan Truman and Burt Briggs were able to leave the hospital and go to their homes. Burt recovered rapidly, for he was young and strong, and had no bones broken. His mother was happy once more, for he was going about the house in his usual quiet way, eating three meals a day and otherwise enjoying himself.

One evening a knocking at the front door startled him and his mother. He went to the door himself.

"Hello!" his mother heard him ejaculate, and, on running out into the hall, was surprised at seeing the entire company of No. 2, in helmet and red shirt, pouring into the house, accompanied by wives, daughters, or sweethearts.

"This is as bad as a fire, eh, Burt?" called out one of the company as he shook his hand.

"Just the kind I like," he replied. "Mother, they've got us! Look out, for there are two widowers in the crowd."

The party laughed heartily, for it was the first time any of them had ever heard him speak banteringly!

Suddenly he saw Nannie Truman in the party, and, for a moment or two, his heart stuck in his throat.

She came up to him, extended her hand, saying:

"I am so glad to see you up again, Burt."

"Thank you, Nannie. How is your father doing?"

"He is improving fast, thank you," and then Mrs. Briggs took her away, for she was a favorite with the widow.

It was a surprise party—something that had not happened for many years to Mrs. Briggs. All the visitors had brought refreshments with them, and a very happy crowd it was.

Burt was seated by Nannie's side, when Jerry Billups stood up on a chair on the other side of the room, and called out:

"Friends, let us have perfect quiet for a few moments, for I have something to say which I wish all to hear," and then he proceeded in a neat little speech, to speak of Burt's exploit at the last fire as one that had thrilled the hearts of all true men and women in Edgewood. He grew eloquent, and Burt turned red and pale by turns as he listened.

"Here is a cross of gold," the speaker said, holding up a jewel of that description in order that all in the room might see it, "and on it are engraved the name of Burt Briggs, the name of his company, and the lives he has saved at the risk of his own. It is my duty at the command of the fire company to which we belong to present it to him with the request that he keep and wear it as a token of their appreciation of him and his daring acts."

He walked across the room and pinned the jewel on the lapel of his coat. Burt was white as a sheet. He had never dreamed of such a thing happening to him, and did not know what to do.

Mrs. Briggs went over to him, and said in her motherly way:

"You must thank them, my son."

He sprang up as though stung, and exclaimed:

"Thank them! My heart has done so already. Every throb is more eloquent in gratitude than tongue or pen can utter. My tongue halts, but the pulsations of my grateful heart goes on singing a sweet song of comradeship. I didn't dream of this when I saw my comrades in the grasp of the fierce flames. I sprang to their assistance because my heart urged me to do so, and never once did a thought of the danger to myself enter my mind. Deep down in my heart to-night dances a spirit of joy, of happiness which never danced there before. I have dreamed of many things—for I believe I have always been a dreamer—but never of such scenes as this. A beautiful spirit came to me in your midst to-night, and told me that he whose limb was broken at the fire was improving fast. Another said the baby boy was unhurt, and Joe Hulsey has come here to grasp my hand with a manly 'God bless you, my boy,' on his lips. Yes, comrades, I shall wear this cross of gold over my heart. The camera of love and friendship has already photographed it on the tablets of memory whence it can never be erased. If memories of earth go with the souls of men beyond the grave, this blessed incident of my life will become a part of my own immortality."

If his daring at the great fire astonished those who saw it his eloquence amazed all who heard it. No one ever suspected him, who had ever been silent in company, of having such a voluble flow of language as now poured from his lips. His mother was the most surprised of all. She sat spellbound to the finish, and when he ceased speaking she saw the others rush toward him, but could not leave her seat to do so herself.

Clang!

Clang!

Clang!

The great fire bell startled them as though the stars had fallen.

"Our district!" cried Burt, as by an inspiration. "No. 2 to the rescue!" and ere anyone could utter a word to prevent him he turned and bounded out of the house, going through the open window.

"Stop him! Bring him back!" screamed his mother in frantic fear.

But every man was gone, leaving a score of maids and matrons with the widow. She saw that he was gone with them, and knowing that he was not yet fully recovered from his injuries, she gave a piercing scream and fell fainting to the floor.

The engine house as but two blocks away, and every man was quickly on hand. Some one gave Burt a red shirt and hat, and he quickly donned them.

"Go back, Burt!" cried several firemen, as they dashed out into the street.

But young Briggs did not seem to hear them, or if he did, he failed to heed them. They dashed away, and as he was in their midst, going as fast as the fastest of them.

The fire was in the residence of Judge Lofton, one of the wealthiest families in the city. A bottle of naphtha had exploded in the hands of a servant on the stairs, and in an instant the entire stairway was enveloped in a sheet of flame.

There were several members of the household upstairs at the time of the explosion, whose retreat was cut off by the flames. Among them were two daughters of the family, a young lady visitor, and two maid servants. They all rushed to the head of the stairs, only to find a seething caldron of flame reaching up toward them. The smoke forced them back, and back they went, screaming at the top of their voices.

Prompt as the firemen were, ere they reached the house the

flames had invaded every room above the first floor, and the helpless maidens were at the windows screaming for aid.

The ladders were run up to the windows, and Burt Briggs bounded up one of them in advance of all the others.

One of the girls was terrified at the situation she lost her reason and ran hither and thither. The others were caught and taken out, but this one, the younger of the two sisters, eluded Burt for a minute or two. He had to chase her to a third room ere he got a good grip on her. By that time the flames had made such headway escape seemed utterly impossible.

Suddenly he tore two blankets off a bed and rolled her in them till she could no longer struggle. Then he lifted her over his shoulder and ran to the head of the stairs. They were in flames, but still intact.

"God help me!" he exclaimed. "It's my only chance!" and he ran down the flight with his helmet pulled far down over his eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

ROBBED OF THE CROSS OF GOLD.

The firemen and spectators were in a fever of suspense over the non-appearance of Burt Briggs. No one knew how many inmates were in the upper part of the house at the time of the explosion on the stairs, hence nobody knew that he was struggling to save one of the Lofton girls.

The cry that he was lost was again raised, and the firemen looked at each other to see if anyone dared to brave certain death by going in after him.

The naphtha had given the flames such a fierce headway that they now poured through each window in angry, hissing volumes. Men held their breath as they gazed up at those windows, and cheeks blanched as the moments flew by and the daring young fireman was unseen.

Suddenly something rolled out of the front door and along the floor of the piazza to the steps, down which it went bump—bump—bump till it reached the ground. It was afire in several places, but no one seemed to know what it was until a red-shirted fireman rose up from it, staggered a couple of paces and fell to the ground again, gasping for air.

"Great Scott!" gasped Joe Hulsey. "I believe that's Burt!" and he sprang forward and raised the fallen fireman.

Others rushed forward to his assistance and found that Burt was part of the bundle that had rolled out of the burning building.

Two others took up the bundle lying at the foot of the steps, and ran out of the reach of danger with it.

"Somebody is in it!" sung out one of the two.

They unrolled it, and found Eunice Lofton in it, white as a sheet and unconscious.

"Good Heavens!" cried both firemen.

"It's Eunice Lofton!" exclaimed one who knew her.

"Take her into that house over there!"

"Ah! Here she is!" cried Judge Lofton himself, rushing through the crowd and snatching the unconscious girl up in his arms. "Thank God they are both saved!" and he started toward the house of a neighbor across the street with her.

The crowd gave way for him, and he soon bore her to where her sister Irene lay in a fainting condition.

Burt was so strangled by smoke that he had fallen unconscious, and the firemen believed that he was again badly hurt. His clothes were burned in many places, but he was hurt but little beyond the strangling by the smoke. They were taking him to the ambulance when he came to and asked:

"Where is she, boys? Did I get her out all right?"

"Yes, Burt, but how is it with you, old man?"

"I am all right—only got strangled with smoke. She lost her head—was crazy as a loon, and ran from me into about all the rooms upstairs. Who is she?"

"One of the Lofton girls," replied one of the firemen.

"Well, she is one of the liveliest girls in a fire I ever heard of. Isn't hurt, is she?"

"Don't know. She had fainted when her father took charge of her," and the firemen let go of him, seeing that he was able to move about on his feet, and hurried back to the fire. Burt looked about him for a few brief moments, and then joined them at their work.

The splendid mansion was very badly damaged, but by no means destroyed. The constant stream of water kept going by the firemen soon gave them control of the fire.

"You had better go home, Burt," said the acting foreman to the young fireman a few minutes later. "You have done enough to-night."

"I have done no more than some others, and I am all right."

"You were pretty badly strangled."

"Yes, but I am all right now," he replied.

"Where is that gold cross?"

Burt looked at the place where it had been pinned on the lapel of his coat, and said:

"I forgot all about it, and left it on my coat when I put on this shirt in the engine house. I'll get it when I go back."

"By George, Burt, it's too valuable a thing to leave lying round loose that way," said the foreman.

"Yes, of course, but it's safe, I guess. I've often left my coat there."

"A coat is a different thing. You had better go back right now."

"The boys will all go back in a little while. I'll wait for them," and he was so determined in his manner the foreman said no more to him.

Half an hour later Judge Lofton came out of the house in which his family had found refuge, and asked one of the firemen who the two men were who had rescued his daughters. He was told. One was a married man, a carpenter, and father of four children, and the other was Burt Briggs, the youngest member of the company.

He went to the carpenter and expressed his gratitude in the strongest terms, promising to always be his friend. Then he went to Burt, grasped his hand, and said the same things to him.

"I am very glad I was able to catch her, sir," Burt replied. "She ran from me, and I had to chase her into several rooms before I could get hold of her. I had to roll her up in blankets before I could manage her. I think she lost her presence of mind in the excitement, and hope she is all right again."

"Yes, I think so, too. She is very easily excited. You must remember that I stand ready at all times to befriend you. My wife will also thank you when she sees you."

"There is no need of either of you doing so. We did no more than what was expected of us," Burt replied.

"Very true; but very few people do all that is expected of them. When a man risks his life for another he is an exception, and should be honored therefore," and the judge wrung his hand, and then turned away to return to the house from which he had just emerged.

When the fire was all out the firemen returned to their quarters with their engine. Burt at once repaired to the place where he had left his coat. It was not there. He looked about the room, thinking it had been moved by some of the other firemen, but could not find it.

"Boys, my coat is gone," he exclaimed, going into the en-

gine room where a number of them were cleaning it up, "and that gold cross has gone with it."

"The deuce you say!" half a dozen exclaimed at once. "Where did you leave it, Burt?"

"I threw it on a chair when I put on this shirt."

"Where?"

"Upstairs in the hall. I never thought of the cross when I did so."

Every fireman present at once went to hunting for the coat. Five minutes were enough to convince them that it was not in the house.

"It has been stolen," said Burt, looking from one to the other firemen. "I would not have taken ten thousand dollars for that cross, poor as I am."

His face was pale as death as he spoke, and an angry gleam flashed from his eyes.

"God help the thief if I catch him!" he said in cold, quiet tones as he turned away from the search.

Half an hour later he was at this humble home. Nannie Truman was with his mother, Mrs. Briggs having begged her to spend the night with her, thinking Burt might be detained very late at the fire.

They were both up when he entered the house.

"Where was the fire, Burt?" his mother asked him.

"It was Judge Lofton's house," he replied.

"Dear me! Such a fine house it was. Was anybody hurt?"

"I don't know. Nobody was lost, though. Somebody stole my overcoat from the engine house, and that gold cross was on it."

"Oh, Burt! Surely you have not lost that, too!" Mrs. Briggs cried, springing to her feet and running to him.

"Yes, it is gone. It was on the coat."

She wrung her hands and almost wept, saying:

"Oh, it is awful to lose that! What will they think? Why did you go to the fire when you were not able to go? Nobody expected you to go to any fires for two weeks yet!"

"Don't blame him, Mrs. Briggs," said Nannie, going to her side. "See, his shirt and trousers are burned in several places! Burt, did you get scorched again?"

"My clothes did," he replied.

"You have been saving another life. Who was it, Burt? Tell—your mother about it."

"I went in and brought out Eunice Lofton. She went crazy and ran right into the fire, and—Hello! what's the matter, Nan?" and he sprang to her side and caught the young girl in his arms in time to prevent her falling to the floor.

CHAPTER V.

SEEN IN A DREAM.

On hearing the name of Eunice Lofton as the one Burt had saved from the flames Nannie Truman gave a gasp, turned pale as death and reeled. Had he not caught her in his arms she would have fallen.

She pressed her hand to her heart as if to still its throbbing, and at the same time tried to disengage herself from his hold.

"Why, what's the matter, child?" Mrs. Briggs asked, taking told of her hand and gazing into her face. "You are ill! Bring her to my room, Burt!" and she led the way to her bedroom.

Burt tried to lead her, but she seemed to have utterly lost the use of her limbs. He lifted her in his arms and bore her to the room and laid her on his mother's bed.

"Leave her to me, Burt," said Mrs. Briggs, and at once

took charge of her, while Burt went out and retired to his own room.

"What is the matter, dear?" the widow asked Nannie, as soon as Burt had left them together.

"I—I—don't know," she stammered in reply. "I think it was just a fainting spell."

"Why, I didn't know you were subject to fainting spells."

"I am not. I never had one before. It must have been caused by something I ate."

"What did you eat, dear? Are you in any pain?"

"I am in no pain. I ate some cake," and the girl's face turned very red for a moment or two, and then all the color left it again.

Just ten minutes after leaving the room, Burt knocked on the door and asked how Nannie was.

"Tell him I am all right," Nannie whispered to the widow.

"She is all right," his mother replied.

"Well, good-night to both of you," he said, as he turned away to go to his own room again.

"Good-night," they both answered.

When the morning came Nannie had slept but little; yet she arose with the widow and assisted her in the dining-room and kitchen. She greeted Burt with a smiling face when he appeared, and said:

"Mr. Boyle next door has just told us all about the fire last night, and how you saved the young lady. Some day or night you will go into a fire and never come out again."

"What would you have me do? Stand by and see women and children burn up and not try to save them?"

"No," said his mother. "Try to save them, but when you see that you can't save them, save yourself."

"Yes, of course. That's what I did think I'd have to do last night, but I finally got out with her all right. But my trousers are ruined, I guess," and he looked down at them as he spoke. "They will go to pieces in a day or two, as they have a dozen brown spots on them. Better be there than on my skin, though," and he laughed as he sat down to the table opposite Nannie.

"Are you acquainted with Eunice Lofton?" Nannie asked, after a pause of some minutes.

"No—don't believe I'd know her if I should see her on the street."

"She is very beautiful," Nannie remarked.

"Do you know her?" Burt asked.

"Yes—we belong to the same Sunday school. But she never notices poor people."

"That is the way with nearly all the rich people—young ladies particularly," remarked Burt.

"She is very beautiful and very popular in society," said Nannie.

"Yes, so I have heard," returned Burt. "But if she is one of the stuck-up kind she can't be popular with me."

Both Nannie and the widow laughed.

"You don't know till you meet her. She can smile so sweet and look so beautiful when she tries to," Nannie remarked. "She can turn a man's head as easily as I can a doll's."

"She lost her head last night, so she can't turn mine, no matter how beautiful she may be."

"Wait till you meet her and she begins thanking you for saving her life. You'll come away dead in love with her, just as a dozen other young men have done."

He merely smiled, and then the talk turned to other matters. After breakfast he escorted Nannie home, going in to see her father, the foreman of No. 2.

"Hello, Burt!" Truman exclaimed on hearing his voice, as he entered the house. "Come in and see a fellow."

Burt went in, and Truman congratulated him on what he had done the night before, adding:

"I have heard all about it. It was a daring piece of work, my boy, and I guess you have made a strong friend of the judge, if you don't get the big head and try to marry the girl."

"I hardly think I am such a fool as to try that on, Mr. Truman," Burt replied. "How is your limb getting on?"

"It is mending all right, I think. The doctor tells me I am doing as well as any man of my age ever did. When will you be able to go to work again?"

"I think I can go to work on Monday—if I don't get roasted again," and he smiled. "I half suspect that I'll get baked some time."

"Well, put that off till you go where the fire burns all the time," remarked Truman. "A man should never lose his head even in a fire."

"Nor break a leg," returned Burt.

"A man is not responsible for explosions."

"No, nor is he responsible for a good many other things that happen. I hardly think I shall ever go into a burning building and deliberately lie down to be roasted. Yet a fireman can go to a fire once too often, just as a pitcher may go once too often to a well for water. You can rest assured I shall never burn in a fire if I can get out. You won't be able to get out on election night, I suppose."

"No, of course not. Who are you going to vote for?"

"I don't know. I hear there are half a dozen candidates for your place. Who is the best man for it?"

"Joe Hulsey—vote for Joe."

"I shall be glad to do so. Did not know he was a candidate."

Burt came away after a short visit and spent the day at home with his mother.

Two days later, as he was deeply interested in a book, a carriage drove up and stopped in front of the cottage. The coachman came to the door and knocked. Mrs. Briggs opened it.

"Does Mrs. Briggs live here?" he asked.

"Yes. I am Mrs. Briggs," was the reply.

He bowed low and then returned to the carriage to open the door for a young lady, who alighted from it and ran nimbly up the steps, saying:

"Mrs. Briggs, I am Eunice Lofton. I have come to pay my respects to you as the mother of Burt, who saved my life," and ere the widow could say a word she threw her arms about her neck and kissed her. "I am sure you are proud of your brave boy, and—and—he ought to be proud of you," and she kissed her again.

"My dear child, I am proud of my boy," and she returned the young lady's embrace. "He is as good as he is brave, and never neglects his mother."

"May I come in?"

"Why, yes! Excuse me. I forgot. Come in and welcome. I am really glad to see you and know you did not get hurt in the fire," and she led the way into the little parlor of her humble home.

"I never so much as got a scratch or a burn, but I was frightened almost to death. I never knew a thing till hours afterward."

Mrs. Briggs looked at her, and thought her the most beautiful girl she ever saw, and so unconventional in her way. The girl threw off her wrap, sat down on the sofa and asked:

"Where is Burt? I would like ever so much to see him."

"He is in his room reading. He has not been able to go back to work yet since he was hurt."

"Pease tell him I want to see him."

Burt came in, and she sprang up and gazed at him, as if much surprised, and asked:

"Are you Burt Briggs?"

"Yes, that is my name," he replied.

"I owe you my life and I wanted to tell you that I am grateful."

"I believe you, Miss Lofton. Any one who loves life would be. I assure you that I feel very happy over the fact that I was fortunate enough to render you the service I did. Will you be seated?" and he tendered a chair.

She sat down on the sofa and continued to stare at him. At last she said:

"Pardon me, but I must tell you of a dream I had the next morning after the fire. I saw you in a dream, walking with a young girl. I did not know it was you. You were going through Bryant street."

"By George!" exclaimed Burt, "I did go through Bryant street with Nannie Truman that morning!"

"Yes, it was Nannie Truman. I know her. She goes to our Sunday school," and she seemed to be very much surprised over the incident.

"It was a most singular dream," he remarked.

"Yes, indeed. Do you know the Trumans?"

"Yes; I work for her father, and have known her all her life."

"She is a sweet girl."

"Yes; every one thinks that of her."

"And you do, too, I suppose?"

"Of course. I think that of most girls. She doesn't run away from me as you did the other night."

"Oh, my! Did you ever chase her in a fire?"

"No. I don't believe she would rather be burned up than have me catch her. Some girls are mighty hard to please, you know."

She burst out laughing, saying:

"I think you are cruel to say that."

"If I am cruel you are the first one to find it out," he replied.

They chatted together for over an hour, and when she left she told the widow she intended calling to see her whenever she felt like doing so.

CHAPTER VI.

BURT BRIGGS FOREMAN—HIS LEAP FOR LIFE.

It was soon known among the neighbors of the Widow Briggs that Eunice Lofton had called and spent an hour with her, and a great deal of surmising was indulged in over the visit. But Burt and his mother had little to say about it farther than to remark that she was a charming young lady.

Later in the day Nannie Truman called, and when she heard it she turned pale as death.

"She said you were a sweet girl, Nannie," said Burt, "and I remarked I thought so, too."

That brought the color back to her face in a crimson flood.

"Oh, Burt, did you tell her that?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Briggs, very promptly, "and more, too, which I won't repeat. Burt never goes back on old friends."

The poor girl's heart beat so fast on hearing that she had to drop into a seat and press a hand over her bosom. She seemed radiantly happy in her blushing confusion. It was at that moment that Burt had to leave the house on an errand for his mother and when he came back Nannie had gone home.

That evening the members of No. 2 met at their quarters to elect a foreman in the place of Dan Truman, resigned.

Burt was there to vote for Joe Hulsey. There were three other candidates, all of whom were eager for the place.

Jerry Morgan, a man of considerable means—a contractor—was one of the four candidates. He asked Burt to vote for him.

"I have promised to vote for Joe," Burt replied, "though I really have no preference."

"Joe is not the man for the place," Morgan whispered. "He lacks firmness and——"

"I think he is just the man, Mr. Morgan," Burt replied, very promptly.

"Don't you go to making any mistakes, Burt Briggs," said Morgan, nudging him. "I can do more for you than any man in this company."

"But I don't want you or any other man to do anything for me, Mr. Morgan. I can take care of myself," and with that he turned away from him.

The voting began, and when the ballots in the hat were counted, it was found that no choice had been made.

The lowest man was dropped, and another ballot called for, with the same result—no choice.

The lowest man was again dropped, leaving only two—Joe Hulsey and Jerry Morgan—in the field.

"See here, gentlemen," sung out Joe in a loud voice, "I resign my candidacy in favor of Burt Briggs. Let's make him foreman—the youngest member of the company—and we'll never feel ashamed of it."

For a few moments a profound silence prevailed. Then some one said:

"That suits me—Burt Briggs it is!"

The entire company cheered, except three, Morgan and the two who had been most active in his interest. They threw up their hats and cheered three times three and a tiger.

Burt sprang upon a chair and tried to speak. He was pulled down and borne round the hall on the shoulders of his friends, singing and cheering.

Morgan sung out:

"You can't do that. You can't bring in a new candidate after voting has commenced."

"The deuce we can't! Who says so?"

"It's against all rules of——"

"Bah! The majority rules. Are you afraid to run against the boy?"

It was Joe Hulsey who asked that question.

"It seems you were afraid to run against me?" retorted Morgan.

"I am honest enough to admit it. Now is your time to be honest—tell the truth once in your life!"

"I am not afraid to run against any man. I appeal to the chair."

The chair ruled in his favor that it was the rule that no nominations could be made after the nominations were closed.

"Then I move that the nominations be opened again," said Joe.

It was done and Burt was nominated. He tried to decline, but was not permitted to do so.

He beat Morgan five to one amid the uproarious cheering of the firemen.

The contractor was furious.

He turned on Hulsey and poured out a torrent of abuse upon him. Hulsey merely laughed at him. He took up the silver trumpet Dan Truman had carried for two years and handed it over to Burt, saying:

"His conduct after defeat shows the wisdom of the members in their choice."

Clang!

Clang!

Clang!

The great fire bell struck.

"Up, men, and out!" cried Burt, darting for the engine room.

It came like an electric shock, and the beautiful engine shot out through the wide door like a catapult.

Every member save Jerry Morgan dashed out with the engine.

The disgruntled contractor threw down his fireman's hat, drew off the red shirt, and stalked out at his leisure and strolled homeward, leaving the others to do battle against the flames.

The fire was on a resident street where the houses were quite close together. It was in a large brick mansion, and had gained a good headway ere it was discovered, the family having been more than an hour in bed.

Those in the sleeping rooms upstairs were in danger of suffocation. They appeared at the windows and screamed for help.

"Up with the ladders!" cried Burt through the trumpet. "Up, boys, and save life!"

The firemen dashed to the rescue like heroes, and in a couple of minutes two women and a child were brought out and delivered from peril.

"My baby! Save my baby!" cried one of the women, as soon as she felt her feet on the ground and looked about her.

"Which room is she in?" demanded Burt near by.

"That corner room there! Oh, my baby!" she screamed.

Burt sprang up the ladder with the agility of a squirrel, and dived into the burning building through a window.

Men held their breath in suspense, for the house seemed doomed to destruction. Moments seemed hours to those below.

Suddenly Burt reappeared, but on the roof, with a babe in his arms.

"There he is on the roof!" went up from hundreds of throats.

No ladder could reach him.

It was a four-story building.

The flames had burst through the roof and were hissing all about him.

"Men, we must save them!" sung out the chief of the fire department of Edgewood, who had just appeared on the scene.

"Tell us how! Tell us how!" the firemen cried out in reply.

He looked up at him with a face white as a sheet.

Burt was seen to place the trumpet to his lips.

A silence fell on the crowd.

"Send a man up in the next house to open a window!"

That was the message he sent down.

Joe Hulsey sprang to obey.

He ran up to the third floor of the next house and threw open the window, calling out:

"Here, Burt!"

"Catch this baby!" returned Burt.

There was a space of twenty feet between the two houses—a city lot.

He swung the baby back and forth three times and then sent it flying through the air toward the red-haired man in the open window.

Hulsey caught it and a wild cheer, like a sea in a storm, came up from below. Men fell on each other's necks and wept tears of joy over the escape of the child.

Burt, the brave young foreman, seemed doomed. There was no way of escape for him that those below could see.

Suddenly he was seen to run to the flagpole on the roof. He pulled it from its socket and ran with it to the spot whence he had cast the babe. It was thirty feet long and would reach the open window. But it was too slender to bear his weight, hence he could not use it as a bridge over the awful chasm. He leaned over the edge of the wall and gazed down at the window facing the room below. Then he let the larger end of the pole down till it rested on the windowsill, and the horror-stricken people below wondered what he was going to do.

But they were not long in doubt.

He stood up on the extreme edge of the wall and gripped the pole with both hands. The next moment he made a flying leap and went whizzing through the air toward the open window of the next house.

CHAPTER VII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

The slender flagpole bent under the weight of the daring young fireman, as he sprang from the wall of the burning building and went sailing through the air. Men and women held their breath as they gazed up at him. It was a desperate chance—the only chance—and the odds were a thousand to one against him.

Crash!

He struck the upper part of the window, and went through it like a cannonball, scattering broken glass all over the floor of the room and on the ground below. The firemen cheered, for they knew he had escaped death by burning, even if he was killed by the fall.

The man who had caught the babe in that window was there to help him, the babe having been given in charge of the lady of the house.

"Burt, Burt!" cried Joe Hulsey, kneeling by the side of the young foreman, as he lay unconscious on the floor of the room. "Come, come! You are not hurt!" and he seized a pitcher of water on a stand in a corner and dashed some of it into his face.

But he was partially stunned, his head having struck against some of the woodwork of the window, so he did not answer Joe. Blood was trickling from a wound on the side of his head.

"I'll take him down," Joe finally said, and was going to raise him in his arms, when another fireman entered the room.

"How is he?" the newcomer asked.

"He is hurt and doesn't know anything," was the reply.

"Better take him to the hospital."

"Help me take him down."

They took him up and bore him down to the foot of the second flight of stairs. There he suddenly came to, and exclaimed:

"Is that babe all right?"

"Yes, but are you all right?" Joe replied.

"Guess I am. Where am I?"

"In the house next door to the fire."

"I got through the window all right, then?"

"Yes, you came through like a rocket, but the window is ruined."

"Had to do it. Hello! My head is broken, isn't it?" and he looked at the blood that had stained his hand as he put his hands up to the wound.

"Shouldn't wonder if you are broken into fifty pieces," Joe replied.

"Well, let go of me. I can go down, I guess. Say, Joe, you got that baby all right, did you?"

"Yes, the babe is all right."

"And the fire—is it under control?"

"Yes I think it is, but the house is a total loss, I guess."

By this time they had him down to the front door, and as soon as he appeared on the stoop a wild cheering burst from the crowd. The chief of the fire department ran up to him and grasped his hand, saying:

"I hope you are not hurt much, Burt Briggs. That was a marvelous escape from a roasting."

"Well, you see, I don't like being roasted, chief. It isn't a pleasant way to die, you know."

"No, indeed. Are you much hurt?"

"I believe I am dead, but the boys won't have it. If I have a whole bone I don't know where it is. I tried to jump through that window, but I must have gone through the brick wall."

"No, you went through the window," said the chief, as he led him down to the stoop and thence across the street to an ambulance.

"I don't want any ambulance," he said, coming to a full halt. "Let go of me and give me a drink of water."

"But you ought to have your wound attended to, Burt," they said to him.

"It's nothing but a scratch," and he would not go. He remained on the ground a while longer and then went to a drug-store where the cut on his head was washed and bandaged. By that time the firemen were ready to return to their quarters and Burt went along with them.

On reaching the engine-house the boys held another meeting upstairs, at which Joe Hulsey preferred charges against Jerry Morgan for failing to go to the fire with the engine.

"He was mad and refused to turn out because he was beaten for the place of foreman," said Joe, "and I am going to move at the next meeting that he be expelled from the company."

"Better wait and hear his excuse," one of Morgan's friends suggested.

"Yes," put in another; "he may have been taken suddenly ill."

"Bah! I was right alongside of him when he threw down his hat and stalked out. He had a sudden attack of the dumps, and that won't excuse him with me," and Joe Hulsey grew very emphatic in his disapproval of Morgan's conduct.

Burt said nothing about it, but just before the members left the hall he called out to them:

"Say, boys, hold on a moment!" and they all turned and looked at him. "I think you had better elect another foreman. I am the——"

"Oh, shut up!" cried several at once, and then all marched out of the hall in a body.

He laid the trumpet in its place and went out, too, Joe Hulsey taking his arm and accompanying him to his home.

Burt's mother was asleep when he reached home, and did not see him till the next morning. He appeared in the dining-room with his head bandaged, giving her a sudden shock.

"You are hurt again!" she gasped.

"Just a scratch, mother," he replied. "I didn't get roasted this time," and he laughed as he sat down to the table. "What do you think the company did last night?"

"I am sure I don't know. They just let you go right into the fire, I suppose."

"They elected me foreman."

"What! Those men made you foreman! What are you talking about, Burt Briggs?"

"I was elected with but four votes against me, and held the trumpet at the fire last night."

"Well, well! I wouldn't have believed it of them! How did it happen, Burt?" and she sat down opposite to him to listen to his story. She was a proud mother that morning, not so much of the position as of the fact that strong, sturdy men had honored her boy.

"What in the world made them do it?" she asked herself a dozen times that morning. Then, just before noon, a carriage drove up before the cottage and a lady alighted from it and rang the doorbell. She was a middle-aged lady, about like the widow herself. The widow opened the door and the lady stared at her in silence for a minute or so. Then she spoke:

"Will you come in?"

"Are you Mrs. Briggs?" the unknown asked her.

"Yes."

"Where is your son?"

"In his room," and she held the door wide open for her to enter. She went into the sitting-room and looked around like one in a half-dazed condition.

"Take a seat," said the widow, "and I will call him in."

The stranger sat down and Mrs. Briggs at once left the room.

In a few minutes she returned, accompanied by Burt.

"That is my son," she said, as the lady rose to her feet and gazed at the youth. Burt still had the bandage on his head, and was feeling quite sore.

"Are you the young man who threw a baby through the window last night?" the lady asked.

"I did toss one to another fireman who stood at an open window," Burt replied.

"The babe is my sister's, and I have called to thank you for her. She is quite prostrated, of course, or she would have called in person."

"I am glad I was able to save the child," Burt replied. "It was in the room all alone, lying on the bed crying."

"The babe had a gold chain round its neck," the lady continued, "to which was appended a diamond cross. My sister was in the habit of fastening it to the baby's chain every night so as to make sure of finding it the next morning. When the baby was delivered to her last night the cross and chain were both gone. Do you know anything about it?"

"I do not," he answered.

"It is very strange. How could it have disappeared?"

"It may have been taken by somebody, or it may have been wrenched off when it was thrown or caught. The ground between the two houses should be thoroughly searched."

"Who was the man who caught the baby at the window?"

"His name is Joe Hulsey, as honest a man as ever lived."

"I hope he is. Will you kindly give me his address?"

"Certainly. He lives at No. 22 Jayne street," and Burt's eyes gleamed angrily. "Will you kindly tell me how that little babe came to be left alone to perish in that room?"

"She was forgotten in the excitement, I think," was the reply.

"A mother forget her baby in a time like that! She must be a queer mother. She must be either insane or else wanted to get rid of her child."

"Sir!"

"Pardon me," and he bowed low. "She is a disgrace to the name of woman."

"Burt! My son!" gasped the widow, very much astonished at his words. "You forget yourself!"

"No, mother. They think more of that jewel than of the babe and accuse the poor firemen of stealing the diamond. I have a contempt for such heartless creatures."

The lady darted to the door and dashed out to her carriage. She entered it and was driven rapidly away, the widow, stand-

ing in the door of her cottage, gazing after it as long as it could be seen.

CHAPTER VIII.

JARED AUSTIN'S MISTAKE.

As soon as the carriage of the unknown lady was out of sight Mrs. Briggs closed her door and turned to Burt.

"I am sorry you talked so rudely to the lady," she said. "It was very ungentlemanly, and when it is known it will do you harm with respectable people."

Said Burt quickly:

"I have no apologies to make to her or any one else. Her manner and words were insulting, for she wished to let me know that she believed either Joe or I had taken that cross of diamonds—the two men who saved the child from a horrible death! I didn't care anything about it till she sneeringly expressed the hope that Joe Hulsey was honest. That was more than I could stand. She didn't come here to thank me for saving the baby, but to insinuate that I or Joe had stolen the jewel from its neck. Lord, I hope she'll send some man here to speak to me about what I said to her."

His mother was astonished. She never heard him speak so volubly before, save on the night the gold cross was presented to him, nor with such angry emphasis.

"Burt, you must learn to control your temper," she said to him. "Even if she did hurt your feelings, you should not have spoken so rudely to her. You should be a gentleman under all circumstances."

"You are right on general principles, mother," he replied, "but I think this is an exceptional case, and I am glad I said what I did," and he returned to his room to resume reading a book in which he was deeply interested.

In a little while Mrs. Briggs went to his room to tell him that dinner was ready. To her surprise the room was empty. He had gone—she knew not where—and wondered how he had left the house without her knowledge.

Let us follow him.

He read the book but a few minutes on returning to his room, for he suddenly closed it with a snap and said:

"Joe must know of this at once," and he rose up, put on his hat and left the house by the window which opened out on the little piazza.

Ten minutes later he had reached Joe Hulsey's house. Joe had just come home to dinner from his work, and greeted Burt cordially when he saw him.

"Just in time, Burt!" he exclaimed. "We have plenty for another. Come in and have some dinner."

"Here—come out to the back yard, Joe," said Burt, leading him out by the arm. "I've something to tell you," and in five minutes he had told the story of the woman's visit and accusation, adding:

"She has your address, and may either come or send to you. I don't know her name, though I see in the papers this morning that the name of the family is Austin. She said she was the sister of the mother of the babe."

"I know Mr. Austin," said Joe. "He is a very rich man, but I don't know what his business is."

"Well, I thought it best to let you know about it."

"Yes, that's all right. Now come in and have some dinner with us."

"Thank you, Joe. Mother will have dinner ready for me by the time I get back. She probably doesn't know I have left the house, so I must hurry back to keep her from worrying," and he shook hands with him and hurried out of the house to join his mother at dinner as soon as he could.

His mother was out on the little piazza looking up and down the street for him when he appeared in sight.

"Where in the world have you been, Burt?" she asked, as he ran up the steps.

"I ran over to see Joe a few moments," he replied.

"Has she been there?"

"Not yet. I think she decided to go home and let somebody else go round accusing firemen of stealing," and with that he went in and sat down to the table.

"I am afraid you will have some trouble about that cross yet," said his mother, as she sat down at the other side of the table.

"Well, I've lost a cross that I prized as much as theirs was, I guess. If any man hints to me that I or Joe stole it there will certainly be trouble, mother."

"Burt, you must promise me you won't fight about it," said the anxious mother, very much alarmed.

"Well, I won't promise that," he replied. "The man who accuses me will get a fight on his hands as quick as lightning, mother."

"He may be a big man—a very ugly-tempered man, and——"

"Yes, maybe so, but he'll get a fight all the same."

"And you a broken head."

"Well, would you have me act like a coward?" and he looked her straight in the eyes as he asked the question.

"No, but I want you to be prudent, my son."

"Well, I'll promise to try to be so," and he went on eating in silence.

After leaving the table he returned to his room and resumed his reading. He was to go to work again on Monday, and, as he had nothing to do till then, he spent the time with his books.

He had been reading about half an hour when he heard a carriage stop in front of the house. On looking out of the window he recognized the carriage as the same one in which the lady had come over an hour before. A big gray-haired man alighted from it. He had a heavy cane in his hand.

"There may be trouble," he said to himself, looking around the room. His eyes fell on a small hammer which had been lying under his table for some time. He took it up and went to the front door to meet the visitor.

He opened the door ere the man could ring, and, looking him full in the face, asked:

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"Are you Burt Briggs?"

"That's my name, sir."

"A lady called here an hour ago, and——"

"A female called, sir, and said she was a sister of the woman whose child I saved at the fire last night."

"She is my wife's sister. She says you insulted her, and I have called for an explanation."

"With a club in your hand? I'll give you my version in a few words," and he told him just what passed between him and the sister-in-law, ending with:

"I have no apologies to make. It was an outrageous insult to men who risked their own lives to save life and property."

"And you risked life to steal other people's property!" remarked the man, who was Austin himself.

Quick as a flash of lightning Burt raised the hammer and dealt him a blow on the head. He threw up both hands, reeled backward and fell heavily on the floor of the piazza, the big cane rattling down the steps to the pavement.

The coachman sprang from his box and ran to his master's assistance. Burt stood quietly by, hammer in hand, and said:

"Better take him away. I may kill him, and I don't want to do that."

The door burst open and Mrs. Briggs cried out:

"Oh, Burt, what have you done?"

"Just knocked him down, mother. Go into the house and don't make a scene."

But she was too much alarmed to think of going in at that moment. She began to utter exclamations. He put an arm round her and drew her inside, shut and locked the door.

As a matter of course, the neighbors ran out. Ere the coachman could get his master into the carriage over two score, mostly women and children, were before the cottage door of the Widow Briggs.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAWYER'S ADVICE TO JARED AUSTIN.

Mr. Jared Austin was one of the richest men in Edgewood, and one of the most obstinate in temperament. He was reared and educated in the belief that poverty was a crime—that all poor people had criminal tendencies. He believed that a poor man was honest only for lack of opportunity to be dishonest profitably, and as for any refinement in tastes and feeling being known among poor people, he laughed at the idea.

It is not to be wondered at then that when he recovered consciousness, after the stunning blow on the head from the hammer in Burt Briggs' hand, and found himself in his carriage, he called out to his driver to stop.

The coachman obeyed, and asked:

"What is it, sir?"

"What's the matter? Where are you taking me?" the master demanded.

"You have been hurt, sir, and I am taking you home, sir," replied coachee.

"Did that insolent boy strike me?"

"He did, sir, and came that near killing you, sir. You fell like a log, sir, and he told me to take you home lest he should kill you, and that's the truth, sir."

"Did he hit me with that hammer that he had in his hand, John?"

"He did, sir, right on the head, sir, and you didn't raise a hand to him as I'd take my oath, sir."

"Turn round and drive me back there at once! I'll break every bone in his body for this outrage!"

"He'd kill you stone dead, sir," protested the coachman. "All the neighborhood run up, sir, and wanted to hang you, sir. It ain't no place for a gentleman like you, sir."

"A mob wants to hang me, eh? Well, drive me home and I'll see my lawyer about it. Drive me home at once."

The coachman mounted his box again and drove him to his temporary home at the residence of his wife's sister, where he alighted, went in and sent for his physician to come and see whether or not his head was broken.

The doctor came, examined his wound, and said he had received a pretty hard blow, but that nothing serious would result from it.

"You will have quite a bump there for several days, though. How did it happen?"

"An accident," was the reply.

His legal adviser was sent for and the matter explained to him. Austin wanted the boy arrested and punished. The lawyer shook his head deprecatingly, saying:

"Let me advise you to drop the whole business, Mr. Austin. It won't do to arrest that boy."

"Why not? He attacked me and came near breaking my head in the presence of my coachman."

"Very true," assented the lawyer, "but you are a rich man,

he a poor boy who saved the life of your child and came within an ace of losing his own life in doing so. In a city like this there are one hundred poor men to one rich one, and so you see, every poor man would side with the boy, denounce you as an ingrate and hiss at you in the streets."

"Do you mean to tell me that a rich man has no redress for an outrageous assault like that?" Austin demanded.

"No, but when a rich man insults a poor man and gets knocked down for it, everybody will applaud the poor man for resenting it. That's human nature, you know. I would advise you to do nothing in the matter—at least not now."

The rich man was a coward at heart and dared not face the populace in such a case. He remarked to his counsel, after a long silence:

"It's outrageous, but I suppose I'll have to submit to it. The times have changed indeed, when women must submit to insult through fear of a mob of ignorant brutes."

"Yes, the times have indeed changed. Rich men are responsible for what they do or say as well as poor men. As I am your legal adviser, let me impress it upon your mind that a poor man has as much right to resent an insult as a rich man has.

"He has public opinion with him in any case against a rich man, and public opinion is stronger than law the world over."

The lawyer then left, and the rich man had food for thought in quantity. But he was too vindictive in his nature to submit to the blow he had received without getting some sort of satisfaction in return.

"I'll see that he gets a taste of a broken head," he muttered, after the lawyer left. "I am not the man to submit to an outrage like that. I'll put a detective at work to ferret out the thief who took that diamond cross, and if this young Briggs is the guilty one, I'll see that he gets behind prison bars even though I have to leave Edgewood myself. It's a fireman's duty to save life and property. They saved my child, but that's what they were paid to do in such emergencies. They presume on what they do and have no conception of their place in the social world."

Jared Austin was a good hater, and he never forgot an injury to his sense of his own importance. But since his lawyer had warned him of the danger of public opinion he had mentally resolved to resort to cunning for satisfaction for the blow he had received.

Burt Briggs fully expected to be arrested for what he had done, and waited at home for an officer to come for him. But instead of an officer of the law, Nannie Truman came in, with eyes dancing and cheeks aglow.

"Oh, Burt!" she cried, on seeing him with his head bandaged, "you are hurt again!"

"Only a scratch, Nan," he replied, "or I'd be in bed. I am all right."

"You made a narrow escape last night. Mr. Hulsey told us all about it; and you and he saved a dear little baby from—"

"Yes, yes; Joe caught it like an old baseball man, and the little thing wasn't hurt at all."

Mrs. Briggs took her into the kitchen and told her about the fight with Jared Austin, and that she was looking every moment for an officer to come for Burt.

Nannie turned pale as death, and clasped her hands like one in despair.

"What in the world will I do if they lock up my boy?" the mother said. "I believe it would kill me."

"Judge Lofton promised to be his friend as long as he lived," Nannie said. "I'll go and see him about it. They shall not lock him up!" and her eyes flashed as she spoke.

Here Mrs. Briggs could utter a word to stop her Nannie was gone.

Burt soon followed them into the kitchen. He missed the young girl and asked where she had gone.

"She will be back soon," his mother answered, and he sat down to wait for her.

In the meantime Nannie, not knowing where the judge's office was, hurried on to his residence. Just as she came in sight of the big mansion she stopped, turned pale and pressed her hand over her heart to still the wild throbbing there.

"She is beautiful—more beautiful than I—and rich. He saved her life and she has been to see him. Why should he not love her? Why should she not love him who saved her life? Oh, why must I go there?" and she stood irresolute and trembling on the corner for a minute or two. Suddenly she pressed her lips firmly together, and said:

"For his sake," and then went forward, tripped up the marble steps and rang the bell.

A maid came to the door.

"Is Judge Lofton at home?" she asked.

"No, he is at his office," the maid replied.

"Is Miss Eunice at home?"

"Yes."

"Please tell her that Miss Truman wishes to see her," and she stepped inside the door.

The maid showed her to a seat, and then went to summon her young mistress.

"Why, Nannie, is it you?" greeted Eunice, when she appeared, shaking both hands and kissing her.

"Yes," said Nannie. "I have called to see your father, and as he is not at home I thought it best to see you," and she told her story, adding:

"I know you will help him who saved your life, Miss Eunice."

"Indeed I will. Just wait till I order the carriage. We'll go and see my father at once," and she ran out to the carriage.

When she came back she led Nannie up to her room and said:

"What a brave fellow Burt Briggs is! Did he really knock down Jared Austin?"

"Yes, and hurt him so his coachman had to lift him up like a dead man and place him in his carriage."

"Served him right. I could just dote on a man like that. He isn't afraid of anything or anybody, and would risk his life for another at any moment. There's a true man for you, Nannie!"

Nannie turned pale as death again as the young girl rattled on in her praises of Burt Briggs. How could Burt resist such beauty and wealth?

"Why, what's the matter, Nannie?" Eunice exclaimed, on seeing her pallid face. "You look like death," and she ran to her side, took her hand in hers and talked to her.

Nannie sprang to her feet and said in a husky tone of voice:

"Let me go home. You—you will see—your father and Burt," and with that she reeled and staggered toward the door at the head of the stairs.

CHAPTER X.

NANNIE'S STRANGE VISION.

As Nannie Truman staggered out of the room Eunice Lofton darted after her, just in time to prevent her from falling headlong down the flight of stairs. She caught her round the waist and drew her back. Nannie gave a low moan and sank down in a death-like swoon right at the top of the flight.

Of course Eunice was excited. She was going to cry out when the housekeeper, a strong-minded, elderly woman, came out of another room and asked:

"What's the matter, Miss Eunice?"

"Oh, Mrs. Ames! She has fainted," Eunice replied.

"Well, dear, don't make any fuss and excite your mother," said the housekeeper. "I'll take her to your room and then you can tell me about it," and she took up the young girl and bore her back into the room she had just left. There she laid her on a bed and turned to Eunice with:

"What's the matter with her?"

"She has fainted."

"What made her faint?"

"Excitement, I suppose. She came to see father about something, and he not being here, she fainted at the head of the stairs as she was going out. Why don't you do something for her?"

Mrs. Ames coolly sprinkled some water in Nannie's face, asking at the same time:

"Who is she? Do you know her?"

"She is Nannie Truman. I know her. She is a good girl."

Nannie opened her eyes, and a long-drawn sigh escaped her. Eunice leaned over and kissed her, saying:

"Oh, Nannie! You gave me such an awful fright! Do you feel better now?"

"Yes. What did I do? I felt myself falling, and then everything seemed black to me."

"You simply fainted, dear," said the housekeeper. "You should not let yourself get so excited. It is very dangerous. Wometimes."

"Yes, Nannie looked at the housekeeper in some surprise. She had never seen her before, and did not know who she was. Looking hard at Eunice, she was going to ask who she was, when the latter said:

"Mrs. Ames is our housekeeper. She brought you back in here. She is right. It is wrong for you to get so excited. Can you get up and walk? The carriage is ready, and we'll drive down to father's office and see him. Then I'll go with you to your home."

"Yes, I can walk. You need not take so much trouble on my account," and she stood upon her feet, pale as death and still quite weak.

"Oh, I can't think of letting you go out alone looking and feeling as you do, dear. Mrs. Ames, please help her down to the carriage, and——"

"Give me some water, please," Nannie asked, dropping into a chair.

Eunice herself ran for water, and in a minute or two Nannie said:

"Thank you. I am ready to go now," and she rose to her feet and led the way downstairs and out to the carriage. Eunice followed her and almost pushed her into the vehicle, and, as soon as she was seated by her side, said:

"You were awfully frightened when you fainted. Do you often faint?"

"No—never but once before that I know of. I fear I am not well," and she still appeared pale.

"You are easily excited, are you not?"

"I don't know."

"Well, try not to get excited when we are at father's office, or the papers may get hold of it if you should have another faint."

They soon arrived at the judge's office and found him in. Eunice introduced him to Nannie, and told him what she had called to see him about, adding in her playful way:

"You must help Burt because he saved me from a roasting, you know."

"Yes, of course. If he needs me, let him send for me, and

I'll go to his assistance as quickly as I would to the president of the United States."

"There! What did I tell you, dear?" and the impulsive Eunice threw her arms around Nan's neck and kissed her. "Now come on; let's go and tell Burt what he says," and she actually led Nan out of the office without giving her a chance to thank the judge.

Once more in the carriage, they were driven rapidly to the cottage of the Widow Briggs.

They both sprang out and ran into the house like two young children. The widow had an expression of surprise on her face as she met them. Eunice ran up to her, threw her arms about her neck and kissed her, saying:

"Oh, Mrs. Briggs! Nannie tells me that Burt has been cutting up awful, and I have come to tell him he must behave himself and be a good boy."

A burst of laughter behind her told that Burt had heard her. She wheeled round and exclaimed:

"My! I hope you haven't got your little hammer with you."

Even Nannie laughed.

"No," Burt replied. "It would be no protection against two such girls as you and Nan."

"I guess neither of us mean to do you any harm," she retorted, in a playful spirit. "But father says you must send word to him if you need him. You will do that, won't you, Mrs. Briggs?"

"Indeed I will," the widow replied, her face beaming with satisfaction.

The two girls spent an hour there, and then Nannie prepared to return to her own home. Eunice insisted on taking her in the carriage, and so they left together. In a few minutes they reached the home of the Trumans. Nannie invited Eunice in, but she said she did not have time to do so.

"But I will call and see you in a few days," she added. "Do you go to the Briggses often?"

Nannie looked up at her quickly, as if to divine the motive of the question, and said:

"Our families visit once or twice a week. Mrs. Briggs and my mother were playmates when children."

"That must be pleasant. I really must meet your mother. I know I shall like her. How is it Burt has never been to our Sunday school? Why haven't you made him join it?"

Nannie was standing on the sidewalk and Eunice remained in the carriage. That question about Burt caused Nannie to turn white as a sheet in the face. Eunice instantly read her secret and turned pale herself. Ere Nannie could answer her question she called to the coachman to drive home. The carriage sped away and the two young girls parted without so much as saying good-by to each other.

Nannie stood there gazing after the carriage till it was out of sight, and the expression on her face was one exceedingly difficult for one to decipher.

"She loves him!" she hissed through her pretty teeth, "and I—I hate her!"

Then she entered the house to find her mother at the front window.

"Who is she?" her mother asked.

"Eunice Lofton," was the reply.

"I thought so, though I could not see her face well. How came you with her?"

Nannie told her the whole story, and then went to her room where she threw herself on her bed and gave way to an untrollable fit of weeping.

Some fifteen minutes later she suddenly ceased crying, dried her tears, bathed her face so as to remove the appearance of having shed any tears at all, and sat down in a rocking-chair, wearing a very determined expression on her face. She gazed

up at the ceiling with a hazy, far-away look in her eyes for half an hour. Then she sprang up as though alarmed at something, and crept forward toward a corner of the room, gazing intently at space, her entire frame trembling with suppressed excitement. In that condition she stood still as a statue for several minutes, gazing till her eyes seemed to be riveted on some object.

Suddenly she gave a start, drew a long breath and appeared like one just coming out of a deep sleep. Looking around in a bewildered sort of way for a moment or two, she staggered back to the chair in which she had been sitting, dropped heavily into it, and exclaimed in half frightened tones:

"Have I been dreaming? I was not asleep, for I was on my feet, yet I saw Burt's cross of gold in a man's hand as plainly as I see my own hand now. But I don't know who he is. Oh, what does it mean? How did I see it? I was not asleep. I am sure of that, for I was on my feet when I came to myself," and she sat there like one bewildered, gazing at the floor. "I am sure I would know his face were I to see him again. He had a scar on the left hand at the base of the thumb. I wonder if I ought to tell Burt or the police? Why, they would laugh at me for a silly goose. No, I won't say a word about it, but I'll look out for a man with a scar on his left hand," and she arose, looked in the glass to see if all traces of tears had vanished from her eyes, and then went downstairs to assist her mother in the housework.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ACCIDENT OF NO. 2, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

Jared Austin had the good sense to follow the advice of his legal adviser, and gave up the idea of having Burt Briggs arrested for the horrible blow with the hammer. He even sent a friend to the newspaper offices of the little city to beg that no allusion be made to the trouble between himself and the young fireman. Of course, the papers were willing to oblige a rich man in a matter like that, and the people in the block where the Briggs lived were very much surprised at seeing no mention of the fight in the press.

But the people talked and talked till pretty near every soul in Edgewood had heard something about Burt having downed the rich man on the piazza of his home with a hammer, and that the coachman had to take Austin away more dead than alive.

At the same time, though, the report was circulated through the town that a valuable diamond cross was stolen from the clothes of the babe on the night its life was saved, and that both Briggs and Hulsey were suspected of having taken it.

When the fire company met again at the engine-house every member was present. Jerry Morgan was on hand, defiant and aggressive, ready to fight the charge against him of failure to obey orders when a fire call had been made.

The members had all heard the report about Burt and Joe, and were indignant in the highest degree. They stood about in groups and discussed it. Morgan and his three friends quietly asked if the others felt proud of their boy fireman.

"Yes, I do," said Jack Bailey, turning suddenly on the contractor, "and the man who won't stand by him under such circumstance has no business in this company."

"That is for me, I suppose?" said Morgan, very coolly.

"Every word of it," replied Jack.

Jerry Morgan was not a coward, but he had a good deal of prudence. He knew Jack Bailey could thrash him in two minutes, and he was not in quest of a thrashing that night.

When the members were called to order Morgan moved that

Burt Briggs be requested to resign the foremanship of the company, on the ground that the fire company could not afford to have for foreman one whom many people believed to be a thief.

Burt sat unmoved. But Jack Bailey sprang up and said:

"At the last fire this company was here in attendance at a regular business meeting. An election was held and Burt Briggs was elected foreman with only four votes against him. A few minutes later the fire bell called us to the post of duty. Jerry Morgan was present, but refused to go. We all know why. We have no room here for skulkers, therefore I move that he be expelled from this company as an undesirable member."

All but four voted to expel him.

Morgan was dumfounded.

He sprang up and demanded to be heard; but the members were mad and told him to get out.

Burt called for order and said:

"Mr. Morgan should have been heard before being expelled, and——"

Jack Bailey replied:

"He didn't ask any explanation of you, but wanted you to be requested to resign. Let him go and be hanged to him!"

The others yelled and cheered, during which Morgan left the hall in a rage, vowing vengeance on the entire company.

"I am sorry this has occurred," said Burt when order was restored.

"Now you keep quiet," said Jack, and the other heartily. "We are doing this thing, and we mean right."

"That's so!" sung out a dozen or more in a cho

They passed resolutions of confidence in both Burt and a few minutes later the alarm of fire was given.

"To your posts, boys!" cried Burt, springing for his hat, trumpet and red shirt.

Every man present promptly obeyed, and Edgewood No. 2 engine went out with a roar.

But ere they had gone two blocks from the engine-house the left fore wheel of the engine came off, and the splendid engine went down, throwing one of the firemen to the pavement with such force as to break his arm. The driver fell forward on his face, and lay like one dead.

"What's the matter?" cried Burt, but in another moment he knew the nature of the accident, and knew that the engine could not be used.

"Leave the engine!" he sung out through the trumpet. "To the fire and do the best you can!"

Quick as a flash every man dashed away with him, going in a body, two abreast, like a military company, and in less than two minutes they had reached the fire.

It was in a row of frame houses, occupied by workmen in a large factory two blocks away.

"Save life!" cried Burt. "Do I see any one?" he dashed into one of the houses and found an old woman who had fallen down, suffocated by smoke.

A policeman sent out another alarm, and the great fire bell signaled all the other fire companies. In a few minutes they were on hand, and three streams were turned loose on the devouring flames. But the fire had gained a dangerous headway, and a terrible conflagration was threatened. All the firemen worked like heroes, and saved a number of women and children.

But it was plain to all that four of the frame houses were doomed. The fire had too much headway ere the engines arrived. The fifth house was filled with a dense smoke and all the inmates were driven out by it.

"There's an old man in the back room on the third floor!"

cried one of the women out in the street. "He's trying to get a box out and it's too heavy for him!"

Burt heard her and sprang forward to bring out the old man. The other companies were pouring streams of water on the house to keep it from igniting. The dense smoke that filled the house came from the cellar, where a pile of old rags had ignited.

He reached the third floor and heard some one gasping.

"Come out! Come out!" he cried at the top of his voice.

"My gold! My bonds! Save 'em!" he heard a gasping voice say in a room on his right. He rushed in, so blinded by the smoke he could see nothing at all. But he ran against an old man and seized him in his arms.

"Come out!" he cried, and started back with him.

To his utter consternation the old man fought him like a demon, crying out:

"My box! My box!"

"Save yourself! Come!" and Burt did his best to get him out of the room. In the struggle that ensued they both fell to the floor, gasping for air and coughing in a half strangled state. In sheer desperation Burt seized his feet, ran with him out into the hall and went bounding down the stairs. The old man bumped on every step, but the young fireman, believing him to be a crank or lunatic, paid no attention to his yells.

A dense volume of black smoke issued from doors and windows. Such a vast column belched through the front that no fireman dared face it. A number of them were there, wondering how long Burt could remain inside, he and the old man came tumbling out, gasping and "Why, she he is! There's the old man!" and they made a Burt smile drag them both out of harm's way. Burt soon re- "I neither at the old man was half dead, and had to be sent to the hospital.

"I've swallowed smoke enough to make all my inside black," Burt said to Joe Hulsey, as soon as he could speak. "That old fellow fought like a tiger, saying he wanted his box taken out. Where is he?"

"They sent him to the hospital," some one said.

There was blood on Burt's face where the old man had scratched him, but he did not seem to mind it. They would not let him do anything more, as all the people living in the house were out. The one from which the old man was taken out never really caught fire. The burning rags in the cellar, whence came the black smoke, were soon drenched with water and the danger over. But the other four houses were a total loss, burning to the ground on account of the accident to Edgewood No. 2.

As soon as it was safe to do so, the police permitted the whipped who lived in the house that was saved to return to their apartments. Scores of neighbors assisted them in carrying their furniture back to their rooms, and hence for hours a stream of people went in and out and up and down the stairs. All that long the several families were busy setting things to rights and taking account of the extent of damages they had sustained.

CHAPTER XII.

JOE HULSEY'S SUSPICIONS.

The members of No. 2 returned to their quarters after the fire, wondering how it was that a wheel should come off their engine at such a critical moment. They were severe in their remarks about the carelessness of the engineer, whose duty it was to keep the engine in good order at all times.

When they got to the engine they found the engineer, who had never left the engine, looking for something along the street with a lantern in his hand.

"What are you looking for, Mack?" Burt asked him.

"The nut of the wheel that came off," was the reply.

"How came it off?" another asked.

"That's what I would like to know. It was taken off by somebody."

"Are you sure of that?" Burt asked him.

"Yes, I am sure of it."

"Well, let's get the engine back into the house and then investigate it."

It was not an easy thing to do. A fire engine is a very heavy vehicle, and it took them many hours to get the wheel on and keep it on till they could get it back to its quarters. But they finally succeeded.

"Now see here, boys," said Engineer Mack, "ever since I was made your engineer this engine has never been out without being thoroughly inspected by me on its return—every joint and nut and screw being examined by me in person. When I came in to-night from supper I examined each wheel and tried the nut with the wrench, the fireman holding the light for me at the time."

"That's true," said Bill Stokely, the fireman.

"So you see somebody took off that nut while I was upstairs at the meeting," said Mack.

The members looked hard at each other, their faces wearing expressions that were puzzles to decipher.

"Who could have done it?"

That question came up in the mind of every one present. What was the motive of the guilty one?

That was another puzzle.

They went home a very much disgusted lot of firemen, and the next day learned that the four houses that were burned down belonged to Jerry Morgan, the contractor.

The papers also stated that three of the houses could have been saved without damage but for the accident to Edgewood No. 2, in whose district the fire was.

Burt was at breakfast when the doorbell rang. He went to the door to see who was there. It was Joe Hulsey.

"Hello, Joe! Come in!" he said to him.

Joe went in, and taking Burt by the arm, said:

"Burt, I think I know who removed that nut from the engine wheel last night."

"The deuce you do!"

"Yes, though I can't swear to it, yet I believe it way down in my soul."

"Well, who did it?"

"Jerry Morgan."

Burt actually staggered.

"Joe, I can't believe it," he finally remarked, shaking his head. "He wouldn't dare do such a thing."

"Jerry Morgan is one of the most unreasonable men in all Edgewood. In a fit of rage he left the hall last night, vowing vengeance on the entire company for expelling him. He passed downstairs right by the engine when no one else was there."

Still Burt shook his head.

He could not believe it possible that Morgan would do such a thing and said so in so many words.

"Well, I believe it. He wanted to punish us for electing you foreman and expelling him."

"That is merely your suspicion, Joe. You will get into trouble if you speak of it to any one. Just let it alone and wait and watch."

"Of course. But don't forget what I have told you about it. It seems like a retribution that his property should be the victim of his treachery."

"Oh, he is insured, I guess," Burt remarked.

"Of course. He keeps all his property insured; but the insurance hasn't been paid yet," and Joe shook his head in a way that told how determined he was in the matter.

Just as Joe was going to leave the engineer's fireman knocked at the door.

"There's Bill," said Joe, as Burt went to the door.

"Hello, Bill!"

"Mack says come down to No. 2 as soon as you can," said Bill, and the next moment he turned and hurried away.

"I guess Mack has found out something," remarked Joe, who had heard what Bill said.

"Yes—let's go down and see what it is," said Burt, going to his room for his hat.

They left the house together and walked down the street to the engine-house.

"What is it, Mack?" Burt asked.

"A man has been here to see you," the engineer replied.

"What did he want?"

"He says the old man whom you dragged out of the house last night is an old miser of the name of Mathews. He had a box of bonds and gold which he was trying to get out when you jumped on him, knocked him down and dragged him out. When he came to in the hospital he made such a fuss about the box the doctors let him go, and he made a beeline for his house. The box had been broken open and robbed, and the old man is in a rage, swearing you had robbed him."

"Great Scott!" gasped Burt.

Joe laughed and said:

"Tough, eh?"

"Well, I should say so," and a look of disgust was on Burt's face as he listened to the engineer's story. "It's enough to make one resign from any fire company. This is the second time in two weeks, Joe."

"Yes. I am your pal in the first case, you know," and Joe laughed again.

"There are people who believe an accused man is always guilty. They can't understand why one man should risk his life at fires unless it is to take advantage of the opportunities thus afforded to steal valuables."

"I guess you are right," assented Joe.

"You haven't found the nut yet?" Burt asked of Mack.

"No. I have ordered another one."

"Made any discoveries?"

"Yes. The wrench with which I tighten up the nuts and screws was used by some one last night. I always place it in a certain position in my box for convenience sake. When I found it last night it had been dropped back into the box in quite a different way."

"That shows that it was done by some one who knew where you kept your tools."

"Yes, of course."

"My box! Where is my box, you thieves!" cried a voice at the front door, and on looking around they saw an old man, poorly dressed, running toward them with a wild look in his eyes.

"That's the old man!" said Joe, who had seen him the night before. Burt had not seen him, for the old fellow was taken to the hospital before Burt recovered from strangulation by the smoke.

"My box! Give me my box, you thieves!" the old man cried, rushing up to the engineer and clutching him savagely by the collar.

"Hands off, you old fool!" said Mack, shoving him away.

"I don't know anything about you nor your old box."

"They said it was the foreman of this company who dragged me out of my room last night, and——"

"I am the man, sir," said Burt. "I took you out and saved

your life. You made a great fuss about a box, but the smoke was——"

"You robbed me, you young villain! You stole my gold, my bonds and diamonds!" and he sprang at his throat like a demon or a maniac. Burt tried to defend himself, but the attack was so fierce and sudden he was borne to the floor with the old miser's long, bony fingers clutching his throat.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS NOTE.

The fierce onslaught on Burt by the old miser startled both Joe and Mack.

They stood by and looked on for a few brief moments, believing that Burt could easily throw him off. But to their utter amazement they saw that he was but an infant in the fierce old man's hands.

Just as the two went down on the floor, with the long, bony fingers of the old miser clutched about Burt's throat like bands of steel, both Mack and Joe sprang forward to separate them. They seized the old man and tried to drag him away, but he held on with the tenacity of a bulldog. Mack seized him by the feet and ran toward the further side of the door with him. Burt was dragged along also.

"Hold on, Mack!" cried Joe.

Mack stopped, and Joe tried to unloose the old man's on Burt's throat. But they were like bands of steel—attenuated fingers.

Whack!

Biff!

Thump!

Joe gave him three blows on the side of the head, and the old man let go—knocked senseless.

Burt sprang to his feet, almost black in the face from the choking he had received, and was going to resume the fight when Joe caught and held him.

"Let go of me, Joe!" cried Burt, hoarse with rage. "Let me get at him!"

"Keep cool, Burt," said Joe. "He is an old man."

"I don't care how old he is. He can't come choking me like a dog!" and in a moment Joe was in a fierce struggle with him to keep him from getting at the old man.

The old man came to very quickly, for Mack had let go his hold on him. As soon as he found himself free he sprang at Burt again. Joe drew off and let them have the matter in their own hands.

Quick as a flash the old man made a clutch at Burt's throat. But the young fireman dealt him blow after blow in the face till he went down with stars flashing before his eyes. Then Burt stood over him, looking down at him, his eyes blazing like a tigress.

"Don't hit when he is down, Burt," said Joe.

"I won't, but if you fellows interfere with me again I'll kill you!"

The old man pulled himself together and scrambled to his feet, crying out:

"My box! Give me my box or I'll kill you!" and he sprang at Burt's throat again.

Burt downed him with a tremendous blow between the eyes.

Again he rose with the same cry and attacked the young fireman, only to be downed once more.

"Come, Burt, let up on him!" cried Joe. "He is an old man and——"

"Stand off, Joe Hulsey!" hissed Burt, "as long as he comes

up and attacks me I'll down him. If you interfere I'll kill you!"

The old man came up again and went down the third time. He seemed to be satisfied with that, for he sat on the floor, crying out:

"My box! Give me my box!"

"Hang you and your box!" returned Burt. "I never saw it and know nothing about it. Why don't you go to the police and have them find it for you?"

"They would rob me!" he exclaimed. "They would take my gold, my bonds, my diamonds!" and he wrung his hands in an agony of avaricious selfishness.

"See here, you stingy old fool!" cried Burt. "Why do you accuse me of taking your gold and bonds? I saved your life and you accuse me of robbing you!"

"They said it was you who took me out, pulled me away from my box, and I have not seen it since. They say you stole a diamond cross off a baby. My gold! My gold! Give me my gold!" and he sprang at Burt again. But Mack and Joe held him.

"See here, old man, I am sorry your gold is gone. I never stole a penny's worth of anything in my life. I never so much as saw your box. I heard you crying out and gasping in the room. I ran in, unable to see an inch before my nose, caught hold of you and dragged you out. You fought me all the way out, yelling for your box. Had I left you there you would have died by your box. I am sorry I did not leave you alone,

but I think a man who loves gold as you do ought to die by it. That's life and roast in fire through all eternity. If you reply, of theft again I'll kill you as sure as my name is

"Why should I?" "You hate gold," Burt smiled. "I neither like nor hate gold," said Joe, "Burt came out of the house

and never went back again, as hundreds of people and all the firemen can swear. As the house did not burn, the different families who live there all went back into it, and scores of people assisted them in carrying their goods in; so you see that a good many people had a chance to take your box, as you were not there to look after it. Hire a good detective to look after it for you and you may get it."

"Detectives cost money," said the old miser, shaking his head.

"Yes, but if he finds your gold you would be glad enough to pay him."

"No—no—I can't pay him!" and the old wretch again wrung his hands in distress, moaning: "My gold! My gold! My gold!"

"Send him about his business," said Burt. "We have no time to fool with him. If he isn't crazy he ought to be horse-whipped."

Mack led him to the door and said to him: "Don't come here again. You might be worse hurt than you are," and he shoved him out.

The old man went away and the three firemen resumed their discussion of the accident to the engine the night before. The engineer was positive that the mischief had been done while the members were all upstairs at the meeting.

"I agree with you," said Joe, "and we'll find out who did it, too."

"Don't accuse anyone till you have some tangible proof, Joe," said Burt.

"No, but I'll look for the proof till I find it," and he shook his head in a very determined way.

"Whom do you suspect, Joe?" the engineer asked.

"Wait and I'll tell you in time," Joe replied.

"If I knew who it is I might help you look for proof," suggested Mack.

Burt shook his head at Joe and the latter was silent.

Two of the other members came in at that moment, and the talk became general on the subject of the accident. By and by the chief of the fire department came in to see what he could learn about the matter.

"We must have an investigation," the chief said.

"Of course," assented all the others. "There was no carelessness here," the engineer added. "I inspected the engine a half hour before the alarm sounded, assisted by Bill Stokely here."

"It was malicious mischief, undoubtedly," remarked the chief. "But who has any malice against Edgewood No. 2?"

No one answered, and the chief gave an inquiring glance at the firemen around him.

During the day the engineer received a note through the mail, to which no name was signed.

It read:

"You will find the nut from your engine wheel somewhere in the vacant lot on the corner above the engine-house."

It was written in a disguised feminine hand. Mack did not waste any time speculating on the handwriting, but set off at once, accompanied by three members of the company, to search the vacant lot.

"There it is, by George!" exclaimed Bill Stokely, running across the lot and picking it up.

Mack inspected it and found it to be the missing nut, the absence of which had proved so disastrous to the four houses burned the night before.

They returned to the engine-house and placed it in position again, after which they again examined the note. No one knew the handwriting, and so it became a deep mystery.

Word was sent to Burt at his home, and he hastened to the engine-house to see the note. He read it very carefully and said:

"I don't know the handwriting."

That evening the entire membership was on hand, and the note was passed around.

Every member shook his head in a puzzled sort of way as he looked at and read it. They went home completely mystified.

CHAPTER XIV.

BURT RECEIVES AN UNSIGNED NOTE AND DOWNS JERRY MORGAN.

As a matter of course, the unsigned note created a sensation, not only among the firemen, but all over the city. The chief of police sent an officer to the engine-house to see the note. Then, late in the afternoon, an insurance agent called and asked to see it.

Hoping that identification might follow, Mack showed it to him. He read it carefully, and then drew one from his pocket, opened it and said:

"The same hand wrote both."

"Let me see yours," said Mack.

"Yes, of course, but say nothing about its contents till the matter is cleared up."

Mack read it in utter amazement.

"Mr. Copeland," it ran, "I see in the papers that several of the houses burned on Bailey street night before last are insured in companies represented by you. If you knew the cause of the accident to Edgewood No. 2 fire-engine I don't believe your company would pay the insurance money. But for that accident the houses would have been saved—three at least, anyway. You had better investigate the matter before paying."

Like the other note, no name was signed to it.

"Both were written by the same hand," said Mack, as he looked over them.

"Of course they were," said the insurance agent; "but what do you think of this one?"

"I don't know what to think except to say that the writer of the notes must know something about that accident. We found the nut where the note told us to look for it."

"Well, I'm going to have it investigated by a New York detective," the agent remarked.

"That's right. Who owned those houses, Mr. Copeland?"

"Jerry Morgan."

"So I heard, but I didn't know whether or not it was true."

"Is it true that he was expelled from the company on the night of the fire?"

"Yes."

"Do you think he had anything to do with the fire?"

"I never thought of it. He couldn't have been there, for the alarm came after he left here."

"But the nut on the engine wheel?"

Mack looked hard at the agent for an entire minute without saying anything. He had not thought of that. He was a plodding, honest fellow, but not as quick as some others in unraveling puzzles.

"I don't know," he finally said.

The agent, seeing he could not get him to say more on the subject, went away.

At the very same moment the agent was showing his unsigned note to the engineer of Edgewood No. 2 Burt Briggs was reading a similar one at his home, which he had just received through the mail. It was undated as well as unsigned, and read:

"The man who has your cross of gold also has a scar on his left hand at the base of the thumb. I saw it in his possession."

Burt was a picture of amazement when he read that. He gazed at it like one in a dream for several minutes. Then he sprang up and paced his room to and fro for many minutes, after which he seized his hat and dashed out of the house.

Five minutes later he darted into the engine-house and called out to Mack:

"Let me see that note again?"

Mack gave it to him.

He produced the one he had received and held them close together.

"Both written by the same hand," he exclaimed.

"You have one, too?" the engineer asked in astonishment.

"That's three!"

"Three!" gasped Burt. "What do you mean, Mack?"

"A man has just left here with one in the same handwriting."

"Who is he, and what is his note about?"

"He is Copeland, the insurance agent, and the note warns him not to pay the insurance on Morgan's houses until he first finds out about the removal of the nut on the engine wheel."

Burt gave a prolonged whistle expressive of a vast amount of astonishment. Mack took the note out of his hand and read it.

"Yes, all three were written by the same hand," he said, as he finished reading it. "And you want to find the writer just as quick as you can, Burt."

"Of course, but how can I?"

Mack shrugged his shoulders like a Frenchman and handed the note back to him.

"Do you know a man with such a scar on his left hand, Mack?" Burt asked.

Mack shook his head, saying:

"I don't believe I do, Burt."

"Well, it's one of the mysteries I can't unravel."

"Maybe it will unravel itself after awhile," Mack remarked.

"I don't like to wait in a matter of this kind. I can stand anything but suspense."

"I don't see how you can do otherwise."

"I don't, either, but I am going to try to find out who wrote these notes," and he turned away, putting the note back into his pocket. Before leaving the engine-house, however, he pledged Mack to secrecy as regarded the note he had just received.

A few days later, while he was at work for Dan Truman, a man called on him, asked if he was Burt Briggs and said he wanted to see him privately.

"My time belongs to my employer," he replied. "I can see you after six at the engine-house."

"I am a detective, employed by the insurance company to——"

"Yes—yes, I understand," said Burt, interrupting him. "The insurance company pays you. My employer pays me. Neither of us have any right to waste the time that belongs to our employers."

"I want to ask you some questions about——"

"Yes—ask away, but you must be a snide detective to be asking questions publicly."

The detective turned red in the face and said:

"You seem to be a very bright young man and——"

"That is more than you seem to be," Burt replied.

ing at his work while the other workmen chuck-

"You won't give me any information then——"

"No, not till I know who you are."

"My name is Benson. Here is my shield."

"Haven't time to look at it. Meet me at the engine-house of Edgewood No. 2 after six o'clock and I'll look at it."

The detective was angry, and was going to say something hot, when Joe Hulsey, who was Truman's foreman, said:

"See here, my friend, just get out of this now. You can't come here and stop my men from work to help you on with your business without a permit from our boss. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I think I do. But I thought that young Briggs was as much interested as the company is."

"That may be, but as he is an honest man he never takes his employer's time to attend to his own business."

"Very particular—very, indeed," the man sneered, as he turned away.

"That fellow is a queer detective. I must say," Hulsenroth marked, as the man walked off down the street.

"I don't know much about the detective business," Burt, "but I have an idea that a good detective keeps his glean-ness pretty well to himself."

"Of course he does. If every man he talked to knew he was a probing detective he would get very few points."

When the day's work was done, Burt wended his way homeward. About halfway home he saw Jerry Morgan, the contractor, standing on the corner with both hands in his pockets. He was going to pass him when Morgan caught him by the arm, saying:

"Here, young man, I want to see you!"

Burt stopped and faced him. He was carrying a small pot of paint in his right hand.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"Did you write to the insurance agent not to pay me the insurance on my houses until——"

"I did not," Burt replied, not waiting for him to finish the question.

"Sure you didn't?"

"Yes—quite sure," was the quiet reply.

"Do you know who did?"

"No."

"Sure of that, too?"

"Yes."

"Well, some of you fellows did, and if I can find him out I'll make him wish he had never been born."

"Will you let me ask you some questions now, Mr. Morgan?"

Burt asked him.

"Yes, of course."

"Did you take the nut off that wheel when you went downstairs that night?"

Morgan turned white, then red, and blurted out:

"No! Who says I did?"

"I have heard no one say so, but every member of Edgewood No. 2 knows that you went down alone when no one was below, and a few minutes later the nut was missing, and your houses were destroyed in consequence. I am quite sure the majority of the members believe you did it."

Again did he turn white and red by turns; but he recovered and said:

"I don't believe you. I believe you are at the bottom of the whole business."

"What business?" Burt asked.

"That of trying to turn suspicion against me," was the reply.

"Why should I?"

"You hate me."

Burt smiled and replied:

"I neither love nor hate you. I believe, though, that you took that nut."

"Ten thousand furies! I'll choke the life out of you!" and the irascible contractor made a clutch at his throat. Burt jumped back. Morgan sprang forward and made another grab at him.

Quick as a flash Burt hurled the pot of paint in his face. It was quite heavy—some ten or twelve pounds in weight—and the contractor went down like a log, stars dancing before his eyes, and paint flowing over his face and garments.

CHAPTER XV.

"I'D DIE FOR HIM!"

The moment Jerry Morgan fell at full length on the ground from the effect of the blow given him by Burt Briggs with the pot of paint, an explosion that shook the entire city was heard.

Burt wheeled and looked in the direction of the noise, and saw a dense volume of smoke coiling up over an immense building some three or four blocks away.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "The Boyden factory has blown up. That means a fire," and he dashed away toward the engine-house of Edgewood No. 2 as fast as his heels could carry him. He reached there just as the fire bell rang out a general alarm.

Ere any other fireman but Mack, the engineer, appeared he had on his fireman's hat, red shirt, and trumpet slung over his shoulder by the cord.

"Hurry, boys!" he cried, as the firemen dashed in. "There are lives at stake in that fire! Let her go!"

He dashed out, and the engine went thundering after him.

Taking a short cut, he got there a few seconds ahead of

the engine, and selected the hydrant he wanted. Edgewood No. 2 was nearly sixty seconds ahead of any other engine.

At every window in the upper story of the factory young women and girls, and some men and boys, were frantically calling for help.

The boiler below had exploded, tearing away the stairs and elevator, portions of the wall and part of the flooring in the southeast corner. To add to the horror of the scene, a large can of oil in the engineer's quarters had been hurled clear across the immense hall, and struck the wall, scattering several gallons all over a lot of inflammable material. It ignited, and the operatives in that quarter had to flee for their lives, making no efforts to extinguish the flames.

"Up with the ladder!" cried Burt, as the other engines dashed up. "Your water through that window on the left! That's it! Get out those girls as quick as you can!"

Firemen ran up the ladders like squirrels, and girl after girl was brought down, many of them more frightened than hurt. But there were so many of them that some seemed doomed to roast ere they could be rescued.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Burt, "there are two girls on the roof! They are doomed sure!"

The next moment he sprang up one of the ladders himself and disappeared through one of the windows, landing in the midst of a group of screaming girl operatives.

How he reached the roof he never knew, so great was the confusion about him. To his amazement he found one of the girls up there to be Eunice Lofton. The other was one he did not know.

"Oh, Burt!" cried Eunice, the moment she saw him, "can you save us?"

"I will try. It's a slim chance. The ladders can't reach to the roof, and there's a mass of girls and boys at each window on the top floor. We can't get through them. Many of them will burn, I fear."

"Why can't we go downstairs?" the other girl asked.

"The stairs were blown away by the explosion," Burt replied, shaking his head.

"Are we lost, then?" Eunice asked, very cool and quiet, so unlike her conduct when her own home was burned down.

"While there is life there is hope," he said. "The flames have not gotten through the roof yet. Ah! I see one chance," and he darted away to the further end of the roof to where the lightning rod came up from the ground. He seized hold of the rod and shook it.

The two girls, pale as death, followed him as though afraid he would leave them to their fate.

"You won't leave us?" the unknown girl said to him.

"No," he said. "If I can't save you I will die with you."

"You must save yourself if you can't save us," cried Eunice.

"I can carry you down this rod, one at a time, if you can hold onto me. To lose your hold is to drop to certain death. Clasp your arms round my neck—your right arm over my right shoulder and your left arm under my left shoulder—clasping your hands on my chest. That's it! Keep cool now and hold fast!"

It was the unknown girl who had caught hold of him. He caught a firm hold on the rod and began to let himself down. A wild cheer greeted him from below.

Down, down he went, slowly and painfully, for the girl was a solid 150-pounder, and she held on like grim death.

When halfway down some of the firemen found a painter's ladder lying on the ground near by. They ran it up, and two went up and relieved him of the burden.

"Thank God for that," he gasped.

Then he looked up and saw the face of Eunice Lofton peering down at him. She was lying flat on the roof, which was a flat, graveled roof.

He waited a moment or two to recover from the terrible strain, and then went back up the rod, hand over hand, while the thousands of spectators below were yelling and cheering the rescue of the other girl.

"Miss Lofton," he said, as he climbed over the edge of the roof, "that was an awful strain on me. We may both fall—I am as weak as a child."

"Save yourself, then," she said. "Leave me to my fate. You shall not die on my account. I am not worth saving twice."

"If I can't save you we'll die together," he replied.

"Burt Briggs, would you die for me?" she asked, looking him full in the face.

"Yes, if it is necessary to save your life."

A roaring noise behind her caused her to look around. The flames had burst through the roof and great red tongues of flame shot upward, hissing, crackling and roaring with fiery glee.

"Come—better fall than roast!" and Burt sprang to his feet. "Have you strength to hold on to me as your friend did?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Then catch hold and cling to me for dear life. That's it. You are not so heavy as she was by twenty pounds or more," and he climbed over the edge of the burning roof with her on his back. The crowd below gazed up in a horror of suspense. It was plain to all that he was overstrained and weak.

Every fireman on that side of the building stopped work to gaze up at the perilous situation. Two stalwart fellows ran up to the top of the painter's ladder to assist him.

Down, down he went, till just as he was about to fall, the two firemen relieved him of his burden.

"Brace up, Burt!" cried one of them. "She is safe."

Eunice promptly fainted when she saw she had been saved. One of the men bore her down the ladder, and the other assisted Burt down.

With a wild yell the others rushed forward, lifted him on their shoulders, and bore him away in a half fainting condition.

Eunice and her companion were taken to the house of a workingman across the street, where they both soon recovered from the shock of their terrible experience.

"Let me down, boys," Burt said to the firemen. "There's work yet to do."

"You've done enough!" they cried.

"They are all out!" yelled someone.

"Let the water do the rest!" cried others.

The four streams of water soon got the best of the flames, though the explosion had made a wreck of the factory.

"Is No. 2 doing her duty?" Burt asked.

"Yes, yes! Hooray for No. 2!"

Cheers and yells greeted him on every side. Someone handed him water to drink and he drank eagerly. In a few moments they bore him to the cottage where the two girls had been taken and set him down.

"Stay here now!" cried Joe Hulsey, "and take a rest. We'll attend to the work over there!" and they left him sitting in a chair on the little porch.

Suddenly Nannie Truman ran out from the crowd of spectators, darted through the gate and sprang up the steps to his side, caught his hand and said:

"I saw it all, Burt. You are the bravest man that ever lived!"

"And you are the sweetest girl, Nan!" he replied.

She blushed rosy red and a happy light beamed in her eyes.

He didn't know that Eunice and her friend were in the room behind him.

Suddenly Eunice came out and stood by his side, a hand on his shoulder, and said:

"Nannie, he saved my life twice, and each time nearly lost his own. I went up on the roof with Miss Boyden, the president of the company's daughter, to see the view from there. That's how we came there. Just think how it came about. He saved me the second time. He told me he would die for me, and—and—I would die for him—the bravest man that ever lived!"

Nannie turned white as a sheet, pressed a hand over her heart and staggered away, losing herself in a moment in the vast throng of people surging by the cottage gate.

CHAPTER XVI.

BURT AND NAN.

When Burt looked round for Nannie Truman she had gone.

"Where is Nan?" he asked.

"She went away a minute or two ago," said Eunice. "Do you wish to see her, Burt?"

"I didn't know she had gone," he replied.

"She went away as if in a hurry about something," and she ran into the house, pulling him along by the arm. "I want to introduce you to Bessie Boyden, whose father owns the factory. You saved her, too."

Bessie grasped his hand and said:

"I owe you my life, Mr. Briggs. I don't know how to thank you enough. My life is at your command. It is not mine, but yours."

Eunice was amazed.

She glared at her friend with the fierce stare of a tigress, while Burt bent over her hand, kissed it and said:

"I was fortunate in reaching you. You were fortunate in knowing how to hug a fellow round the neck. I believe that is the best grip of both of you."

Both girls screamed with laughter.

It was an adroit change of the situation, which neither of them noticed at the time. They laughed and blushed, and he remarked:

"I'm ahead of the other fellows on the hugs. But for heaven's sake keep away from fires!"

"Don't you want us to hug you any more?"

"Not so near the fire, and when so many people are looking at us. The truth is, I am very bashful."

They laughed again, and then others came in and put a stop to the badinage.

The news had been carried to the Loftons that Eunice had been in another fire, and the entire family came in the next morning to see about it. The mother and sister became hysterical when they saw her. Bessie Boyden's mother and father came, too, and then Burt slipped away.

Ten minutes later he reached his home.

Nannie Truman was there telling the widow all about what Burt had done. The mother ran to him, crying out:

"Are you hurt again, Burt?"

"No, mother, not a scratch," he replied. "What did you run away for, Nan?"

"I—I thought I was in the way," she replied.

"In the way!" and he caught her by the arm. "Tell me what you mean by that, Nan. How could you be in the way?"

"She seemed to think I was in the way. She said you had told her that you would die for her, and she said she'd die

for you, and as I didn't care to see either of you die I came away," and there was a ring of desperation and defiance in her voice as she spoke.

Burt looked hard at her for a minute or so, during which time she tried to pull loose from him. But he held on to her.

"See here, Nan," he said, "I did say I would die with her if I could not save her. I would not leave any girl to burn and save myself, and she asked me if I would die for her and I said yes. Do you understand me, Nan?"

Her whole face changed. The color came and went and her eyes had a soft, expectant light in them. She hung her head and looked down at the floor.

"Yes, I understand," she said, in a low tone of voice. "You love her."

"I love you!" he blurted out, jerking her to him impetuously, and clasping her round the waist, "and if you don't say you love me I'll walk into the next fire and stay there."

"If you do I'll walk into the one after and stay there!" she replied. "Oh, Burt! I—I—love you, and—and——"

She laughed in her joy, while tears filled her eyes, and Burt knew she was his. His mother had gone into the dining-room, not dreaming that such avowals were coming. He ran her into where she was, crying out:

"Mother, mother! Nan and I are engaged!"

The widow opened wide her arms, and Nannie ran to her. Said the widow—

"Bless you, you are just the girl I want for a daughter!"

"Oh, I was!" said Eunice Lofton would take him away from me!" she kissing the widow, and then looking shyly round.

"She isn't sweet as you," he retorted.

"But she is!"

"I won't give you up for a million of rich girls."

"When you said you told her you would die for her, I felt as though I wanted to die then and there. You won't let her charm you away from me, Burt?"

"I'll stand security for him, dear," the widow said. "When you go home tell your mother all about it. Don't keep it a secret from her."

Nan put on her hat and was going to run home at once in her great joy. Burt called her back. She came to him and he put his arm round her neck and kissed her.

She darted out and ran home, her heart leaping like a caged bird all the way. Of course her parents were glad, for they loved Burt and had often wished he and Nannie would love each other.

"I was afraid one of those romantic rich girls would win him just because he had saved her life," said Mrs. Truman to her husband.

"But our Nan is the best of all," remarked Dan, "and Burt has the good sense to see it."

Nan went about the house singing, singing like a bird to relieve the gloom in her heart.

She had not been gone ten minutes ere a knocking at the door of the Briggs' cottage called the widow's attention to that quarter. On opening the door she saw a man there with a paper in his hand.

"Are you Mrs. Briggs?" the man asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Is your son Burt at home?"

"Yes, sir. Will you come in?"

"Thank you—no. Please send him to the door for a minute or so."

She called Burt and he came to the door.

"Are you Burt Briggs?" the man asked.

"Yes, that's my name," Burt replied.

"Well, I have a warrant here for your arrest, charged with assault on the person of Jeremiah Morgan."

"Ah! Has he done that?"

"Yes, it seems so," the man replied.

"What in the world does it mean!" exclaimed Mrs. Briggs, in great alarm.

Burt quickly explained the matter to her, saying:

"I'll go see Judge Lofton, and come home again in an hour or two. It is but a small matter."

He went with the officer, and on the way passed the engine-house. He asked Mack to send word to Judge Lofton to please see him at the sheriff's office right away.

Mack sent a messenger at once to the judge's office, and he met Burt at the sheriff's office, saying to that officer:

"I am ready to go on this young man's bail bond for any amount."

"He couldn't have a better bondsman," the sheriff remarked, and the matter was soon arranged. Burt thanked the judge and hastened back home to relieve the anxiety of his mother.

When he reached there he found Mrs. Truman with his mother. They both made him tell all that had happened to him, after which Mrs. Truman returned home. She told Nannie what had happened.

"Jerry Morgan had him arrested," Nan exclaimed, her eyes blazing with indignation. "Oh, but he will repent it! He will repent it as long as he lives!"

"Well, don't you say anything about it, dear," cautioned her mother.

"He will repent it bitterly," repeated Nannie. "Did you say Burt knocked him down with a pot of paint, mother?"

"Yes, that's what he was arrested for," her mother replied.

"I am glad Burt did that."

Mrs. Truman smiled at the manner and tone of Nannie, and then went about her household work, little dreaming of what her daughter meant when she said Jerry Morgan would bitterly repent having had Burt arrested.

Several days passed, and Burt was served with papers in a suit for damages by Morgan, who claimed that a thirty-dollar suit of clothes had been ruined by the paint which had been emptied over him by the young fireman.

"I wonder if he will bring any more suits against me?" Burt said, as he read the papers.

"That is more than I know," said the man who had served them. "I know that he has no love for you or the members of Edgewood No. 2."

"I hardly think they will hang his picture on the wall," remarked Burt, as he put the papers in his pocket.

CHAPTER XVII.

NANNIE TRUMAN TELLS HER SECRET.

Burt Briggs went home with the papers of the suit in his pocket, thinking the matter over, and wondering if he should employ a lawyer to defend him. He entered the house and went to his room. His mother followed him to say that Mrs. Truman had sent her a note by a neighbor's little girl asking her to come over in the evening as she wished to see her.

"You'll have to go, too, Burt," she added, "as I can't go by myself in the evening."

"Of course. Did she ask for me, too?"

"No; here's the note," and she gave him the note to read, and then went back into the dining-room.

Burt glanced over the note and sprang to his feet as though stung by a hornet.

"Great Scott!" he gasped, looking at the note again. Then he felt in his pocket for the note he had received a few days before in reference to his missing cross of gold. He held them side by side, and looked first at one and then at the other.

"The same hand almost, and the same paper," he muttered to himself. "I must find out about this. I don't remember ever seeing her handwriting before, or Nan's, either, as for that matter. I won't say anything to mother about it, but wait and see what I can find out about it."

That evening he went over to the Trumans with his mother. Of course he and Nannie paired off and went into the parlor, leaving their mothers in the room where Dan Truman was still confined with his broken leg.

They were like any other young lovers on such occasions, and enjoyed themselves only as young lovers can.

But by and by Burt said:

"Nan, I want to know who wrote this note to mother?" and he gave her a note to read.

She turned pale for a moment or two, and then asked:

"Why do you want to know?"

"Did your mother write it?" he asked, evading her query.

"No; I wrote it for her," she answered.

"Did you write this one, too?" and he gave her the unsigned note about the gold cross.

She looked frightened and turned all sorts of colors as she read it. He was watching her face all the time. He was convinced from her actions that she wrote it.

"Tell me all about it, dear," he said.

"I—I—oh, Burt, you won't laugh at me, will you?" she stammered.

"No, dear. What does it mean?"

She told him how she had seen the gold cross in the hands of a man with the scar she had described in the note. He seemed astonished.

"Why, you fell asleep in your chair and dreamed it, Nan!" he exclaimed.

"No, I was not asleep, Burt. I got up and went to him as he sat looking at the cross, and that is how I saw the scar on his hand."

"But you were up in your room, were you not?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Surely there was no strange man up there, Nan!"

"No, Burt, but I saw him nevertheless. I don't know how to account for it and am not going to try to, either, but I am certain I was not asleep, and am still more certain that such a man has, or did have, your jewel."

Burt shook his head, squeezed her hand, and said:

"Hereafter, Nan, don't dream of seeing anything or anybody but me."

"But I wasn't dreaming, Burt!" she said, with a good deal of emphasis in her tone.

"Were you awake when you saw the nut from the engine wheel thrown into that vacant lot? Or did you dream of that, too?"

Nan started.

"Did I say anything about that?" she asked.

"Yes, in your note to Mack. You wrote that one, too; and the one to the insurance agent. I've seen both, Nan."

She was silent for several minutes as he sat gazing at her. Then she asked:

"The nut was found there, was it not?"

"Yes."

"Then, if it was a dream, that was true, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it would seem so."

"Then why may not the other one be true also?"

"It may, for all I know. Who cast that nut over into that lot?"

"Jerry Morgan."

Burt sprang to his feet and uttered an exclamation of amazement.

"Nan, do you know that?" he asked.

"Yes, Burt, I do know it to be true."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes, I saw him take it off the wheel, and so did another girl—Josie Weyman."

"Great Scott! Tell me all about it, Nan," and he dropped back into his chair and took her hand again. "How came you to be out that night?"

"I took tea with Josie that evening, and she came back with me to spend the night with me. When we passed the engine-house we stopped and looked in. We saw Mr. Morgan come down the stairs, go to a box, take up a wrench and unscrew the nut, drop the wrench back into the box, and go out with the nut in his hand. He didn't see us as he passed out, for we stepped back into the shadows of the house to escape notice. When he went on up the street we followed, as it was our way home. We saw him throw something into the vacant lot, and heard it strike the ground first and the fence afterward. We didn't think anything was wrong at all, and not until I saw the fuss made in the papers about the accident did it occur to me that he was the cause of it, so I wrote a note to Mr. Mack and told him where to look for the nut."

"Well, well, Nan!" exclaimed Burt. "In this world didn't you tell me all this before?"

"Because I was afraid to. I didn't then that you loved me. I was afraid you might think I was bold and—"

"That'll do, dear. You are just the best and smartest girl in all Edgewood."

"And you don't think I was dreaming?"

"Well, I believe in your dreams," he laughed.

"Will you see Josie and ask her to keep the secret and her to corroborate your story?"

"Yes. I'll do anything for you, Burt."

"Bless you—and I'd die for you."

"Oh, you said that to Eunice."

"Yes, but that was in the fire. I am in love now."

They could not keep love out of business, and who could blame them? They were young and deeply infatuated with each other.

He promised to call the next evening to meet Josie Weyman there, and then went home with his mother.

The next day he was again at work with Truman's hands. Joe Hulsey gave him all the work he could. Burt had never shirked or slouched a job, and Joe knew he could depend on him for faithful work.

Just as he was about to go home to dinner the insurance agent, Copeland, appeared at the building and asked the foreman to permit him to have a few minutes' talk with young Briggs.

"Just wait ten minutes, please," Joe replied. "He will strike off to go to dinner and then you can talk with him as much as you wish."

Copeland waited and introduced himself as the agent who had insurance on the houses of Jerry Morgan, adding:

"The company has held up payment of fifteen thousand dollars insurance, believing that he was in some way responsible for the accident to Edgewood No. 2 on the night of the fire. I have been told that you had told him to his face that you believed he was the cause of the accident. Do you know anything about it?"

"I know more than I can tell you, Mr. Copeland," Burt replied, "but I am following up a clew that will in my opinion fasten it upon him. You know he has had me arrested on the charge of assault with intent to kill?"

"No; I didn't know he had charged you with intent to kill."

"Nor did I until several days after the arrest. If he can prove such intention on my part I'll go to prison for three or four years. I don't believe he can prove it, though. I am satisfied I can put him behind iron bars and am going to try pretty hard to do it. I have no money to pay lawyers, though."

"I am authorized by the insurance company to offer you the services of their lawyer, who is one of the best in Edgewood—free of charge."

"By George! That's kind—and lucky for me! Judge Lofton is on my bond. Who is your lawyer?"

"George Titus."

"Ah! He is a good one. Shall I go to him?"

"Yes, whenever you please."

"Thank you. Tell your company to let him sue. I'll prove his guilt. But keep all that a secret from the public till the trial comes off."

Copeland was overjoyed.

"You are sure of your ground, are you?" he asked.

"Yes, quite sure," and then they parted at the gate of the Briggs cottage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BURT RECEIVES A VALUABLE PRESENT AND MAKES A DISCOVERY.

When Burt went home that evening his mother said to him:

"Burt, Mrs. Lofton and Eunice called on me this afternoon."

"Did they?"

"Yes, and Mrs. Lofton was anxious to see you. She wants to let you and do something for you. She seems really grateful. For Eunice, she just kissed me as though I was her own mother. She gave me this watch to give to you," and she handed him a magnificent gold watch and chain.

"Great Scott!" gasped Burt, as he took the watch from her hand. "It's a beauty! He opened it and in the back case was engraved a record of the two rescues. In the front cover was her picture."

"She is a beautiful girl," he said, as he gazed at the likeness.

"Yes," assented his mother. "You could win her, Burt." He shook his head.

"I love Nan, mother," he said, looking up.

"But Eunice has a fortune, and Nan is poor," suggested the widow.

"I'd rather have Nan in rags than any other girl in silks and in a palace," he replied.

"Ah, bless you, Burt! I like a true heart. I am going to tell you what you said."

"I'll take the watch with me round there to-night. Will you go?"

"Why, you were there last night."

"Yes, but I promised to be there again to-night."

Not suspecting why he had promised to go, the widow went along with him. She was surprised at seeing Josie Weyman there.

Of course she didn't interfere with the young people, but went in to see Dan and his wife.

Burt showed the two girls his watch. They praised it, but Nan did not quite relish the picture in it. She had told Josie of her engagement to Burt, and that mischievous minx asked her:

"How about the picture, Nan?"

"I think it's horrid," Nan replied.

"Come off now!" exclaimed Burt, who saw that Nan had told Josie her secret. "As long as I have yours in my heart, why should you kick on this one in my watch?"

Nan blushed and looked happy, and then Burt began questioning Josie about what she and Nan had seen Jerry Morgan do on the night of the accident to Edgewood No. 2 engine. She told precisely the same story that Nan had told.

"Now, Josie," he said, "you are Nan's friend, and therefore mine. Jerry Morgan is trying to send me to prison. If you and Nan stand by me in this matter I'll send him there!"

"I'll stand by you, Burt," said Josie.

"Thank you. I know Nan will."

"Yes, of course, though you did tell another girl you'd die for her," and Nan pretended to pout.

He laughed and said:

"I suppose I shall never hear the end of that."

"Why, who did he say that to?" Josie asked in no little surprise.

Nan pointed to the watch and Josie opened wide her eyes. Burt then explained it and said:

"It was not a sentiment of love, but one of duty to a helpless girl in the presence of death."

By and by Mrs. Briggs got a chance to talk a few moments with Nan, and told her what Burt had said about how he loved her. The girl was beside herself with joy and managed to tell him before he left that she did not object to his carrying Eunice's picture in the watch.

That night Burt was quite happy in his anticipation of the surprise he had in store for Jerry Morgan.

"He thinks he has me in a tight place," he said to himself in his room, "but I'll make him wish he had never been born before I get through with him. I am the only boy in the fire company, but I'll prove to him that the boy is worse than any hornet that wielded a sting."

A few days later he received a note from the insurance company's lawyer asking him to call at his office, as he wished to have an interview with him. He took an afternoon off and went to see him. He found the lawyer a brainy fellow who, when he had heard his story, said:

"You have got Morgan in your power. He will have to go to prison."

"I shall do my best to send him there," Burt replied. "He is the most recklessly, vindictive man I ever knew."

"Yes, so it seems," assented the lawyer. "Do you wish me to conduct the prosecution for you?"

"Mr. Copeland assured me that you would do so free of charge."

"Free of charge to you. The company will pay me my fee."

"I thank both you and the company. Send for me when you need me. I'll bring the girls whenever you say so."

"Very well, I'll let you know."

Burt left and went down to the street. On the sidewalk he met Eunice Lofton. She bowed, smiled and stopped him.

"I am so glad to see you," she said. "Walk with me, please, for I have something to tell you."

He walked along Main street with her, and she was all animation and smiles. By and by they turned down an unfrequented street.

"Did you know that the diamond cross belonging to Mrs. Austin has been found?" she asked.

"No, I did not?" he said, quite surprised. "Who found it, and where was it found?"

"A fireman found it and got a large reward for it."

"Where was it found?"

"I don't know. Irene, my sister, saw it on Mrs. Austin, and asked her how she recovered it, and she said a fireman named Campbell found it and returned it. I am surprised

that you were not informed of it by the Austins, in view of the way they treated you about it."

"Yes, so am I. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for telling me about it. I'll hunt up Campbell and question him about it."

"I am sorry I didn't find you at home the other day."

"I was, too," he replied. "My mother gave me the watch and chain, and when I look for the time I see your picture. I thank you for your kindness, Miss Lofton."

"I am not 'Miss Lofton.' Irene is Miss Lofton. To you I am 'Eunice'. Don't forget that."

"I won't forget it."

"You won't forget me, either, will you?"

"Never."

"Won't you come and see me sometimes, Burt?"

He was silent for a few moments, during which time she seemed embarrassed.

"I would like to," he said, "but I know people would say I was taking advantage of your friendship for what I had done."

"What do you care for that? If I want you to come, whose business is it?"

"Nobody's but ours. Yet people will talk, you know?"

"Well, let 'em talk. You will come sometime soon?"

"Yes."

"Well, I shall look for you."

They parted on a corner and she tripped along homeward, while he turned and retraced his steps back toward Main street.

Just as he reached that thoroughfare he met the foreman of another fire company, who stopped and shook hands with him.

"I am glad I met you," he said to the fireman. "I am looking for a fireman named Campbell in some one of the fire companies. Do you know him?"

"Yes; Tom Campbell. He belongs to my company. He works for the spring bed company down on Bedford street—a canvasser, I believe."

"Thank you," said Burt. "I'll go down there and see him."

In ten minutes he was at the spring bed factory. Campbell was there, and when Burt spoke to him he saw an ugly scar on the left hand at the base of the thumb.

CHAPTER XIX.

BURT GETS A CONTRACT.

To say that Burt was astonished at seeing the scar on Campbell's hand is to put it very mildly. He was too much surprised to speak for a few moments. When he did speak he said:

"Mr. Campbell, I want to ask you if it is true that you found and returned Mrs. Austin's diamond cross to her?"

"Yes, more than a month ago," was the reply of the fireman.

"Where did you find it?"

"In the open lot between the burned building and the house into which you tossed the baby."

"When did you find it?"

"It was some days after the fire. It was on a Sunday afternoon when I, with a number of others, was looking at the ruins. I waited to see if it was claimed by anybody, and when he advertised for it I gave it up and got the reward."

"I suppose you knew I had been accused of stealing it?" Burt said.

"I heard that both you and Joe Hulse were suspected of having taken it," he replied.

"How is it you didn't let me know you had returned it?"

"Why, I thought they would notify you, or that it would be published in the papers."

"Did they tell you not to say anything about it?"

"I don't remember," and he had a guilty look in his eyes when he made that reply. "When did you hear of it?"

"Not an hour ago, and to make sure that it was true I hunted you up at once. I am very much obliged to you for telling me about it," and he turned to leave.

Campbell followed him a few paces and asked:

"Have you ever heard from your cross of gold?"

"I've never seen it since it was stolen with my coat," said Burt. "I would offer a reward for it if I had the money to offer."

"It's too bad."

"Yes, and I am also suspected of having robbed that old miser, too."

"Oh, everybody knows you could not have done that, though the old villain hints that you had something to do with it."

"Yes, so I have heard. They say he is crazy over his loss."

"I believe he was crazy before," and Campbell laughed as he made the remark.

"I never saw or heard of him before that night, and so don't know whether he was or not," and then he bowed to Campbell and left him.

"There's a mystery about this," he said to himself, as he turned the corner below. "Nan may not have been dreaming after all when she saw the cross of gold in a scarred hand. I can't understand it, and am going to have her see him. If she recognizes him, I'll give the case to a detective. I don't believe he found that diamond cross several days after the fire. He got it the night of the fire, and kept it for the reward. That fellow is a rascal!"

He went home, and found Nan there with her sister. She blushed, and said she came to bring a message to his mother.

"And you didn't come to see me?" he asked.

"No. I thought you would not get home till after six o'clock."

"Well, I am glad to see you, anyhow," he said. "I was going to run in to see you after supper. Just stay till then and I'll see you safe at home again."

The widow made her stay, and after tea Burt walked home with her. On the way he asked her if she would know the face of the man with the scarred hand if she should see it.

"Yes," she replied promptly. "I would know it among a thousand faces. Why do you ask? Have you found him, Burt?"

"I have found a man with such a scar on his left hand as you described. I want you to see if you can pick him out but you must say nothing if you recognize him."

"Where did you find him?"

"He is a canvasser for a bed spring factory. I saw him at the factory to-day. He is a fireman, belonging to one of the other companies."

"How can I see him?"

"I'll go with you to the factory to-morrow."

"When?"

"About the same hour as I went to-day. I think he will be there then."

Burt went home that evening a very happy youth, and his dreams were such that he was happy even in his sleep.

The next morning, as he was going to his work, he was stopped by a man from the wrecked factory, who asked if he was Burt Briggs.

"Yes, I guess I am," he replied.

"Well, Mr. Boyden sent me to ask you to call at his office, as he wished to see you about some painting."

"He is the owner of the factory, is he not?" Burt asked.

"Yes. You saved his daughter from a roasting in the factory fire. She has been very sick ever since."

"Ah! I am sorry to hear that," exclaimed Burt. "Where is his office?"

"In the little house that has been put up in a corner of the factory lot since the fire," said the man.

"Is he there now?"

"Yes; I have just left him."

"Then I'll go by and see him."

He found the rich manufacturer in the little office and said:

"You sent for me. I am Burt Briggs."

"Ah! I am glad to see you, my boy," and the man grabbed his hand and shook it warmly. "I have been wanting to see you and thank you for saving my daughter's life. She has been very sick ever since the day after the fire, so neither she nor her mother could get out; and I have been so busy here that I have had no time to get round to you."

Burt tried to disclaim any credit, but Boyden cut him off with:

"Yes, I know. You did only your duty and all that, but when a man risks life in the discharge of duty he goes up ahead of his fellows. That's how you stand with me. A friend tells me you are a good painter. I have sixty houses that must be painted. I let out the contract last year to a firm who put on very inferior paint. Here's a list of the houses. Take it and look at them and tell me what you will put good paint on them for. When the factory is built up again you can have that job, too."

"Thank you, sir," said Burt, as he took the list. "I'll attend to it and let you hear how soon as I've seen all the houses."

"Go ahead. When Bessie is out again she will send for you, as she wishes to see you."

Burt went away with the list in his pocket, saying to himself:

"By George, I like that fellow! He talks business. Sixty houses! Whew! That's a big contract—a whole year's work for a big gang of painters—and there's money in it, too. I'll make enough out of it to set up with Nan. I'll go by and see Dan about it."

Nan was surprised to see him so early. She and her mother had just finished breakfast when he came in.

"I want to see your father, Nan," he said to her.

She ran upstairs with him and heard him tell her father of Boyden's offer, and asked his advice.

"Take it, Burt, by all means!" exclaimed Dan Truman. "I will set you up at once as a big contractor."

"But I have no money with which to buy paint and pay the men," Burt said.

"Don't let that bother you. I can let you have the paint, and Boyden will pay you every week, so your men won't suffer. Make that arrangement with him. Take Joe along to help you make your estimates."

Burt went away and had a talk with Joe Hulsey.

In a week's time he sent in his estimates, and Boyden told him to go ahead.

He insisted that Dan should be his partner, and Dan agreed, and Truman & Briggs became a firm of contractors. A large force of painters were at once engaged and put to work, with Burt and Joe as foremen to look after them.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CROSS OF GOLD TURNS UP.

While Burt was attending to the contract he had made with Boyden, Nan Truman, eager to help him along, had gone

to the bed spring factory and fully identified Campbell, the man with the scarred hand, as the one she had so mysteriously seen with the cross of gold in his possession.

"I knew him as soon as I saw him," she said, "though I had only seen one side of his face before."

Burt went to see his lawyers and told him the whole story. The man of legal lore was astonished and asked many questions about Nan.

"Such things are scouted at in court," he said, "but in view of your suspicions in regard to the diamond cross, I think we are justified in applying for a search warrant."

"Do so then. I am satisfied he either has the cross of gold or knows where it is," Burt replied.

The search warrant was granted, and a detective whom Burt had posted was sent to make the search, accompanied by a policeman.

Campbell was a single man and lived in two rooms, one of which was always locked and bolted. That one was opened by a skeleton key, and two trunks were found there also locked. It took them a long time to find a way to open the trunks. They finally got them open. To the utter amazement of the two officers a package of bonds, gold coin, jewelry and watches were found.

"These are Mathew's bonds!" exclaimed the detective.

"Yes, without doubt," assented the policeman, as he looked them over.

"Ah! Here's the cross of gold!"

The detective had found it wrapped in a piece of newspaper in the very bottom of the trunk.

"That settles it. The man is a thief. Yet I saw him at the fire on the night this cross was stolen from Edgewood No. 2 engine-house."

"Then he has some pals in the business. We must secure him promptly."

They took charge of the two trunks and sent them to police headquarters, after which they went in search of Campbell himself. It seemed for a time as though he had taken the alarm and left the city, for they did not find him till near midnight. He had failed to report to the factory and was found playing cards in a rear room of a well-known saloon.

When told he was a prisoner he sprang to his feet and drew a formidable looking knife.

"Drop that, Campbell!" cried the detective, covering him with his revolver.

He let the knife fall at his feet.

"Hold out your hands!"

They were held out, and in another moment a pair of handcuffs clasped his wrists.

"Now, what is it all about?" he asked, very coolly.

"Burt Briggs' gold cross."

"What about it?"

"He says you have it."

"He lies! I've never seen it!"

"But we found it in your trunk."

He glared at the detective and turned pale as death, but did not utter a word more. They took him to the station and locked him in a cell, after he refused to answer any question, even as to his name and age.

The cross was identified by several members of Edgewood No. 2 before Burt saw it the next morning. Then old miser Mathews was sent for to identify his bonds. He came like a maniac, and the police had to hold him. He identified the bonds, watches and jewelry, and claimed all the gold coin found in the trunk.

He was locked up in a cell on the charge of disorderly conduct and he raved like a madman for hours.

But not a word would Campbell utter—no explanation as to how the things came into his possession. He asked for a

lawyer and one was sent for. He talked with him, but to no one else.

The cross of gold and the other articles found in the trunks were turned over to the authorities to be used as silent witnesses at his trial. Old Mathews was released on his promise not to bother anyone about his bonds and other things, as they were receipted for and would be returned to him.

The arrest was a sensation in the city, and Burt received congratulations from hundreds of people. Everybody believed that Campbell had stolen the diamond cross of the Austins, and gave it up solely because the reward was more than he could hope to get from it.

Burt told it that the Austins kept the fact of the discovery of the diamonds a secret through malice. It got into the papers and Jared Austin promptly wrote a card denying it. Burt wrote one also, giving him a roasting that made him fairly tremble in his palatial home.

"I am the only boy in the fire company," Burt said in his card. "My beard has not started yet, but when my good name is assailed I cease to be a boy on the instant. Had Mr. Austin possessed any instinct above the lowest brutes he would have informed the public of the recovery of his jewel. But he has never forgiven me for breaking his head, hence the malice of his silence."

"He may be a boy in years," said Judge Lofton, when he read the young fireman's card, "but he wields a pen equal to the oldest writer in the land. That boy has a future before him."

Austin made no reply. He did not care to provoke him any farther. But the firemen kept up the excitement. Every member of Campbell's company signed a card that he was at the fire, and worked bravely on the night the cross of gold was stolen, hence they said he could not have been the thief in that case.

Burt frankly admitted that he saw him at the fire, but could not say how long he remained there. The detectives said he had a pal, and did their utmost to find him.

Campbell himself would not say a word to anyone but his lawyer, and that astute individual was equally reticent.

Time wore on, and Morgan's case against Burt came up in court.

To Burt's utter amazement, Morgan swore that he was struck with a pot of paint from behind, the blow landing on the side of the head—a deliberate attempt at murder, as the paint weighed at least ten pounds. Had it not been turned in some way he would have been instantly killed.

Burt sat like one half dazed by the rank perjury of the man. His lawyer, too, was dumfounded, for he feared that the word of the rich contractor would be believed by the jury as against the poor boy. He cross-examined him long and mercilessly, but did not succeed in making him contradict himself.

Burt asked permission to ask him some questions, and the court suggested that he had better let his counsel ask them lest he jeopardize his case.

"I am willing to take the chances on that, your honor," he replied. "I have implicit confidence in the ability and skill of my counsel. But I am so astounded at the story told by the defendant on the stand that I cannot fully explain some things to my counsel now without a long private consultation with him, which the court cannot wait for me to do."

The counsel arose and consented to his client's request and the court granted it. Counsel sat down and Burt stood up in front of Morgan, looking him full in the face some two or three minutes without uttering a word. Morgan was seen to wince for a moment and then brace up defiantly.

Every eye in the courtroom was on the young fireman. Nearly every member of Edgewood No. 2 was present, and

this turn in the case caused each one to watch him closely to catch every word he uttered.

"Your honor," he called to the judge, in a clear, ringing voice, "I desire to ask if perjury committed on the witness stand in this court in a case like this is punishable by law?"

"Certainly it is," replied the judge.

Burt then turned and gazed at Morgan. The contractor's face grew white as a sheet, and he squirmed in the chair as though it had suddenly grown too hot for him. The judge, jury and spectators noticed his fear and confusion with astonishment. Burt looked round at the twelve jurymen and pointed his finger at Morgan. The contractor seemed on the verge of a collapse when his lawyer sprang to his feet and sung out:

"Your honor, I object to this pantomime. It's an——"

"Keep your seat, sir," said Burt. "I haven't asked your client a single question yet. What are you frightened about? You won't be punished for his perjury."

The judge, court and jury laughed, and the lawyer sat down blushing and greatly confused. Somehow or other he was all broken up by the keen thrust at both himself and client. Burt was as cool as ice, but his eyes flashed as he again turned his gaze on the contractor in the witness chair. Again he gazed silently at him for a couple of minutes, and the suspense of the witness was painful in a marked degree.

CHAPTER XXI.

BURT MAKES A WONDERFUL SPEECH IN COURT.

It was a singular proceeding in a court of justice, and, for the intense interest of the judge himself, in the effect of the young fireman's query as to perjury in his court, it would have been checked by an order to proceed in the examination of the witness.

Again the witness' counsel interposed by asking why he did not examine him.

"I was wondering if he really wished to have me do so," Burt replied. "If he will tell the truth, as he and I both know it, I won't ask him any questions. If he does not, he knows what to expect. What will you do, Mr. Morgan?"

"Tell the truth. I have told it already."

"Do you stick to what you have already testified?"

"Yes."

Morgan had recovered from his terrible fright caused by his first question to the judge.

"Very well. Have you ever made any threats against me in the hearing of anyone else?"

"No."

"You didn't say to Bill Stokely that you would make me wish I had never been born?"

"No."

"Nor to Tom Boyd that some day you'd break half the bones in my body?"

"No."

"Nor to John Boyle that you intended to whale the life out of me?"

"No."

"Did you tell Bob Johnson that if I had not had that pot of paint in my hand you'd have choked the life out of me?"

"No."

"And you didn't tell him that I had the impudence to accuse you of taking the nut off the wheel of the fire-engine on the night your four houses were burned down, and that was what caused you to make a grab at my throat?"

"No."

"You may step down. Mr. Sheriff, please call Bob Johnson. I saw him in the crowd back there a little while ago."

Johnson did not wait to be called.

He came forward and took the stand after being sworn. He said that Morgan, two days after the paint pot episode, told him just what he had told Burt. The other three witnesses sustained the questions Burt had asked Morgan on the stand. Morgan's lawyer could not shake their testimony by even the most rigid cross-examination.

Then he addressed the jury, making the best plea he could under the circumstances. He pooh-poohed the idea of a big strong man—a man of wealth and position—making threats against a youth not yet out of his teens.

When the counsel for Morgan ceased speaking, Burt's counsel was about to rise to his feet to reply. But the young fireman pulled him down, saying:

"Let me intimidate the jury, Mr. Titus," and he rose to his feet.

"I hope, gentlemen of the jury," he began, "that none of you will feel intimidated to the extent preventing you from considering this case on its merits," and that sarcastic remark not only convulsed judge and jury, but opened the eyes of every member of the bar present. They listened with breathless interest, not to say astonishment. His words came in a torrent of eloquence the like of which had never been heard in that courtroom before. When he described the terrors of a guilty conscience portrayed in the human face, as they had seen that day on the witness stand, everyone was amazed at the marvelous descriptive power he displayed.

"And now, gentlemen of the jury," the young fireman exclaimed in conclusion, "your verdict is going to be right. It is going to be a double one—acquitting me and condemning ~~him~~ on the same breath. That is the merciless logic of justice. His honor has declared from the bench that perjury in this court is a great crime. My acquittal means his conviction of perjury, and another trial will end in his consignment to prison. You will bear witness that I sought to save him as he sat there wrapped in the mantle of his crime. But like the ancient Jews, when the Divine Master went over Jerusalem, he would not be saved. His blood be upon his own head, for he destroyed himself in the very temple of justice!"

When he sat down the packed audience was still as the tomb for a minute or two. Then a roar like a storm-swept sea shook the building. The judge nor the court officers could stem the cheering tide. The firemen present yelled themselves hoarse. One of them during a lull sung out:

"And he is the only boy in the fire company!"

Then the storm roared and howled again. But the enthusiasm simmered down and the judge began his charge to the jury. It was calm, cool and fair, leaving the jurymen to the judge of the facts.

The jury consulted three minutes without retiring, and then rendered the verdict:

"Not guilty."

Again pandemonium broke loose.

The firemen, forgetting the dignity of the court, made a rush for the young foreman, lifted him on their shoulders and bore him away. Every spectator followed them out. The judge adjourned court immediately.

It was a triumphal march to the headquarters of Edgewood No. 2. When the firemen reached there a thousand cheering friends were roundabout them. Burt made a short speech, thanking every one present for his good will and sympathy.

That evening Widow Briggs kept open house at her little cottage home. Firemen and friends came to congratulate her and Burt. Judge Lofton came with Irene and Eunice in his

carriage. Beautiful, blushing Eunice ran up to the widow, threw her arms round her, kissed her and said:

"I know you are the proudest, happiest mother in all Edgewood to-night. Papa says it was the grandest speech he ever heard in all his life!" and then, without waiting for the widow to say a word, she looked around for Burt. He was surrounded by firemen. They gave way for her and she went up to him with both hands extended. He caught them in his. Said she:

"I congratulate you, Burt. I hear your praises all over the city. We have never understood you—never knew you till now."

"I thank you deep down in my heart, Miss Eunice," he replied, pressing her hand to his lips. "I didn't know myself that I could make a speech, but something told me I had to do it. The man swore falsely, and I thought I was in a tight place."

"If you will take advice, young man," said Judge Lofton, pressing forward and extending his hand to him, "you will study law and——"

"I have been doing that for over a year, judge," Burt interrupted him.

Expressions of astonishment came from nearly every one present.

In the meantime Mrs. Briggs had sent for Nan and her mother to assist her.

Nan came with sparkling eyes and rosy cheeks, for the young fireman who went for her told her how Burt had astonished the town and ruined Jerry Morgan.

She went round to the rear door, not wishing to pass through the crowd in the front room. Mrs. Briggs was in the dining-room. She and Nan's mother kissed each other, and just then Burt entered. Nan went to him. He folded her to his heart and kissed her. When she pulled away from him she saw Eunice Lofton standing in the door that opened into the corridor, her face the color of death. Their eyes met.

"He is mine!" said Nan, in a low, firm, defiant tone. "We are engaged."

Burt wheeled to see to whom she was speaking, and beheld the fair Eunice sinking to the floor in a death-like swoon.

"Shut that door—quick!" he exclaimed, as he sprang forward and caught her in his arms.

Mrs. Briggs closed the door and Burt bore the fainting girl into the other room beyond the hall and laid her on his mother's bed.

CHAPTER XXII.

TWO SECRETS FOR A LIFETIME.

The sudden swooning of Eunice Lofton in the dining-room greatly demoralized the two elderly women for a few moments. Had not Burt kept his presence of mind, the entire assemblage would have been alarmed.

"Shut the door and sprinkle water in her face," he said to his mother and Mrs. Truman, and he went out of the room, shut the door behind him and joined Nannie, who still remained in the dining-room. She looked him in the eyes in a questioning way, and he said to her:

"Nan, you must never say a word to anyone about this."

"No, I never will," she replied. "But—but are you sure you don't love her, Burt?"

"Yes, I am sure that I don't love any girl but you, Nan,"

She went into the front room, which was filled to overflowing with friends of the young fireman. Judge Lofton was talking, and the others were listening. He was saying that Burt was a marvel and a mystery, and that he would make one of the greatest lawyers in the city, if not in the state.

Just then Burt came into the room and friends surrounded him. Irene Lofton paid him a high compliment, for which he thanked her.

Irene slipped over to Nannie and asked where Eunice was.

"I think she is with my mother and Mrs. Briggs," Nan replied. "Do you wish to see her?"

"Yes. It is time for us to return home."

Nan went out to the dining-room, but not seeing anyone there, she went into the bedroom and there found Eunice just recovering from her swoon. She went up to her and tenderly kissed her. Eunice looked hard at her for a few moments, and then said:

"My heart is broken, Nannie. You will keep my secret, though, will you not?"

"Yes, it shall be sacred with me," Nan replied.

"And with us, too, dear," said the widow and Mrs. Truman.

"We have loved each other a long time," said Nan. "Had he not loved me he would have loved you—he told me that," and she again kissed her. "Your sister is waiting for you to go home with her."

"Please tell her to wait just ten minutes. By that time I can be ready to go."

Nan went out and told Irene what Eunice had said.

When the door closed again Eunice beckoned Mrs. Briggs to her side, put her arms about her neck, kissed her and said:

"You know the secret of my heart. I shall ever love you as a mother because you are his mother. My heart is broken."

But no tears came to her eyes. There was a deep, fathomless despair in their gaze which Mrs. Briggs never forgot.

"Will you let me see Burt a few moments before I go away?" she asked.

"Alone?"

"Yes, just a few moments."

Mrs. Briggs went after Burt, and sent him into the room where she was.

Mrs. Truman had left the room with Nannie.

We shall drop the curtain over that interview, which lasted seven minutes by the clock on the mantel in the dining-room. Those fleeting moments were sacred to both. When he came out his eyes were full of tears and his face pale.

In ten minutes Eunice came out and joined her sister and father, looking a trifle pale, but smiling bravely. Burt led her out to the carriage, saw her seated comfortably therein, bowed and returned to his friends in the house.

The crowd finally dispersed and Burt was left alone with his mother.

"Oh, I wish I could have heard you speak, Burt," she said to him. "Why did you not let me know it?"

"Because I never dreamed of doing such a thing when I left home this morning," he replied. "When Mr. Morgan told such a brazen falsehood on the witness stand I felt that I would lose the case if I did not do something to impress the jury with the idea of his perjury. I was afraid my lawyer would not agree with me, so I just got up and pitched in. I am going to send him to states prison if there is any law to put him there."

They retired, and did not meet again until breakfast time.

Of course the papers were full of reports of the scene in the courthouse, and Burt read them to his mother, who listened with motherly pride.

"Ah!" he suddenly exclaimed, as his eye caught a bit of news as he looked at another column. "Morgan has been arrested for perjury, and had to give bail to appear for trial."

"Burt, can you prove that he committed perjury?"

"Of course I can—easily," he replied.

He ate his breakfast quickly and then hurried off to look after his men who were painting the Boyden houses. They

were all on hand and busy at work. The workmen cheered him as he appeared on the grounds.

"Oh, that's nonsense, boys," he said, laughing. "Don't do that any more."

A few days after that Mr. Boyden sent word to him to call at his office. He promptly appeared.

"Bessie and her mother wish to see you at the house," the mill owner said to him.

"Mr. Boyden, if they merely want to thank me for what I did at the fire I don't want to go," Burt replied.

"My dear young man," said Boyden, "as you grow older you will learn more than you know now, and one of the most profitable lessons will be on the utility of humoring the other sex. My advice to you is to go."

Burt laughed and said:

"Perhaps you are right. I'll go," and he shook hands with the manufacturer and went home to change his clothes.

An hour later he called at the Boyden residence. He was shown into the parlor, where Mrs. Boyden met and overwhelmed him with her thanks. He had prepared himself for it and made the proper reply to her. A little later Bessie came in looking quite pale from her recent illness. Mrs. Boyden left the room and Bessie gave him both her hands and poured out a torrent of thanks for saving her life.

"How could I do otherwise?" he asked, leading her to a seat.

"I don't know. I have tried to do otherwise myself, but my heart has gone out to you ever since that hour, and now I want you to take my hand and fortune with it."

Burt was dumfounded. He had not dreamed of such a thing. Here was a girl, the only child of a man who was a millionaire several times, offering herself to him, a poor boy not yet out of his teens who had a widowed mother to support. He was staggered and made no reply for some moments.

She spoke again, saying:

"You are young, and perhaps never thought of marriage. I never did, either, until you saved my life. I am just twenty. You are not so old. Happiness comes with love, not age, and——"

"But I love another," he blurted out, "and am engaged to her."

She didn't turn pale—she only seemed surprised, and exclaimed:

"Oh, my! Is that so? Who is she?"

He told her, and she asked:

"May I call on her?"

"Of course. She is a sweet girl, and you will not wonder that I love her."

"Well, I'll call on her in a few days."

A little later Burt bowed himself out and went back to his room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"NEITHER OF US CARE TO SELL."

When he reached home he found Nan there. She blushed and asked:

"Where have you been in your Sunday suit on a week day, Burt?"

"Oh, have I got to tell you where I go before we are married?" he asked, playfully.

"Of course you have, when I ask you to," she answered.

"You belong to me, don't you?"

"No. You belong to me," he replied.

She laughed and said:

"That's the same thing. I am to be boss, you know. Now tell me where you have been, sir."

"Well, I've been to see Bessie Boyden."

She turned pale and looked inquiringly at him.

"My poor, jealous little Nan," he said; "you can't hear of my looking at another girl without turning pale and having a great fear tugging at your heart. Have you no confidence in my constancy?"

"Why did you go to see her, Burt?"

"Because she and her mother sent for me. She has been ill ever since the fire, and wanted to see me and tell me how much she appreciated my work on that afternoon. She said she was afraid that any longer delay on her part might cause me to think her ungrateful. I told her I was engaged to you, and she said she would call on you in a few days."

"Oh, Burt, did she say that?"

"Yes, Nan. I believe I could get her if I wanted her, but I have no room in my heart but for one girl, and she is jealous."

"I'll never be jealous again, Burt," Nan said, resting her head on his shoulder.

"We'll see, dear. I hope you won't."

Time passed and Burt was kept busy, working on his contract in the daytime and studying law at night. He visited Nan all day Sundays. She had the good sense to be satisfied with that.

One day he came home to dinner and found Nan there to see him. She had something to tell him, and in the little parlor she said:

"Bessie Boyden came to see me yesterday afternoon and offered to divide her fortune with me if I'd give up you to her!"

"The devil she did!" exclaimed Burt. "She must be crazy!"

"That's just what I told her," Nan remarked. "I said I wasor, selling any sweethearts this year, as I had but one and there wasn't money enough in all the world to buy him. She said you and I were both poor and she could make us both rich. I told her we were both very rich in love and happiness, which was something money couldn't buy."

Burt caught her in his arms and kissed her, saying:

"Neither one of us care to sell out, eh?"

"I guess not," and she nestled up to him, feeling happier than any of the angels. She had won against two of the wealthiest girls in Edgewood, and was the happiest maiden in all the world.

A little later Morgan's suit against the insurance company came to trial. He little dreamed what was in store for him. To his consternation they proved that he was the one who took the nut off the engine wheel of Edgewood No. 2 on the night of the fire. Of course that killed his case, and the jury decided for the insurance company. A second indictment for jury was found, and he was arrested again and put under bonds. He was a ruined man.

But he was rich and obstinate, and believed that a liberal expenditure of money would save him. His lawyer appealed the case, telling him he could get a new trial, and so he tried to brazen it out. The good people of Edgewood shunned him, though, and he got no more contracts in the city.

He sent a man to the two girls to see if they could be bribed to leave Edgewood in case he obtained a new trial. But they flatly refused to entertain the idea.

In the meantime Campbell's trial came up. It was a strange one. He refused to make any explanations as to how Burt's cross and the old miser's effects came into his possession.

The members of his fire company swore he could not have stolen the cross of gold, because he remained at the fire even after Burt left, hence he could not have gone to the engine-house that night. Yet he would not explain how he came by it.

Nor could any one swear he had seen him enter the apartment of the old miser on that night. But the bonds, etc., were found in his possession. The jury convicted him. But his sentence was much lighter than it would have been could positive proof that he had taken them himself been adduced. It was believed by everybody that a woman had taken them, and he preferred to suffer rather than betray. That belief brought him no little sympathy, for it evinced a spirit that excites admiration from many people.

The cross of gold was returned to Burt, and he kept it in a secure place ever after, wearing it only on occasions of moment. He prized it a thousand times above its intrinsic value.

One day he went up to Judge Lofton's office to get a law book which he wished to read. He saw two young ladies there, one of whom quickly drew a veil down over her face. The other he did not know. But he doffed his hat, and asked the clerk if the judge was in.

"Yes, but he is engaged," was the reply. "Can I do anything for you?"

"I don't know. I wish to borrow a book on Evidence."

"I dare not give out a book without his consent."

"Very well. I'll call again," and he started toward the door.

The veiled lady sprang up, laid a hand on his arm and said, "Wait."

He stopped, hat in hand, and gazed at the veiled lady. He knew her voice. She was Eunice Lofton.

"My father has offered Mr. Briggs the use of his library. Let him have the book."

The clerk bowed and went in search of the book, and Burt turned to her and said:

"I thank you!"

She bowed and stood like one undecided what next to do. He took her hand and led her to a seat at the opposite end of the room. She sat down. Her hand was cold as ice in his. He took out his watch, opened it, and let her see the beautiful face—her own likeness on the inside of the lid.

"I shall never part with that face," he said in a low tone of voice, "nor forget whose it is."

She raised her veil partly and let him see her face. It was not only pale as death, but bore traces of most intense suffering. He felt shocked, and taking her hand again, whispered:

"If I am ever free again I shall come to you—if you will let me."

"I will wait for you."

Just then the clerk came with the book, and she rose to her feet, bowed to Burt and walked across the room to where her companion sat.

Burt thanked the clerk, bowed low to the two ladies and left the office.

He never told a living being of that last meeting with Eunice Lofton, and years passed ere he saw her again. She sailed for Europe a fortnight later.

On the very night the ship left New York a great fire broke out in Edgewood, and a score of houses were destroyed by the devouring element. Many lives were lost. Two firemen were killed by falling walls. Burt saved several lives and was himself so hurt that he was laid up a fortnight in the hospital. But his business did not suffer, as Dan Truman was now able to resume work again.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

When Burt came out of the hospital again he had an ugly scar on his left cheek, where he had been cut by a sharp

piece of falling timber. But in the eyes of all the thinking people of the city, he was a hero of whom they were proud. The only boy in the fire company, where many strong, burly men were members, he yet seemed to be the incarnation of courage and daring. The common council of Edgewood voted him a medal and had inscriptions engraved on a silver trumpet and presented to him.

In the following June the entire fire department of the city had a parade through the main streets. A couple of carriages went before Edgewood No. 2, bearing the girls and children whose lives he had saved. Eunice Lofton was in Europe, but Irene rode in her place. In the evening Burt delivered an oration in the Opera House to the brave firemen of the city. It was pronounced a marvel of eloquence by all who heard it, and the chief of the fire department said it would do more good among the firemen than anything that could have been said. Such enthusiasm at a lecture or speech had never before been seen in Edgewood. His mother, who was present, shed tears of joy as she listened. She never dreamed of his marvelous powers of speech.

As for Nan, she almost stood in awe of him after that day. The next day he went to see her.

She trembled in his presence, remembering the grand orator the day before. Her manner puzzled him, and he asked in his lover-like way:

"What's the matter, Nan? Don't you love me any more?"

"I—I worship you!" she said.

"Oh, don't do that, dear," and he laughed. "Just love me. That's all I want you to do, except to name the day when you will come home with me as my wife."

"Oh, Burt!" she gasped.

"The contract has paid me enough to enable me to support a wife and——"

"But we are both so young," she added, eager to have him urge her to yield.

He looked surprised and asked:

"Do you think we really are too young to marry, Nan?"

"I—I—don't—know," she stammered. "I will—do as you want me to."

"Oh, you level-headed little witch! Just see your mother and arrange the day, and I'll get ready for you at mother's. We are both young, but we love hard enough to make up for lack of years, eh?"

She laughed and was happy.

The time was set in a day or two, and Burt applied for admission to the bar a week later. He was admitted, and on the very next day a poor woman came to him to take a case against a railroad in whose service her husband had been killed.

"Madam," he said, shaking his head, "I am too young to cope with the astute lawyers of the railroad. I have absolutely no experience at the bar. I fear I would lose the case."

"I have had a lawyer for months," she replied. "He is a learned man, but can't make a speech to save his life. The case comes up next week, and he has sent me to ask you to help him with it."

"Ah! That's another matter. Who is he?"

"Mr. Adrian, in the Lofton Building."

"I'll go and see him."

He called on the old lawyer at once, and had a long talk with him.

"I have the case in good shape, and all the strong points at my fingers' ends," said the old man. "But one of the counsel for the road is a very powerful man before a jury, hence I suggested that you be engaged to talk to the jury."

Burt went away, and came back in the afternoon to get the points, and read the law and decisions bearing on the case. He sat up nearly all night studying and reading, and

when he went to bed he was a complete master of every point involved.

The case came on, and Burt was on hand, calm and cool, with his law books on the table before him. He took notes of all the testimony for both sides. Adrian was a keen questioner, but Burt several times suggested queries that evinced a clear conception of the spirit of the case.

In two days all the testimony was in, and Burt rose to address the jury. He carried everything before him with his marvelous eloquence, his fairness, his pathos and unanswerable points covering the case. The opposing counsel made the speech of his life, but it was far below that to which the jury had just listened. Burt's closing speech was a crusher. Every juror, and even the judge, was blinded with tears over his word picture of the grief of the widow in her terrible desolation.

The counsel for the road fairly writhed and squirmed under the terrific denunciations that deluged them, and they knew that their defense was a hopeless one. The jury quickly gave a verdict for the widow, and Burt Briggs' fame as a lawyer was made.

He was overwhelmed with congratulations by judge, lawyers and spectators, and Adrian proposed a partnership with him in the practice of law. He accepted the offer.

A few weeks later he and Nannie were married. Every member of Edgewood No. 2 was present in uniform to witness the nuptials and present the bride a splendid silver service.

A year later on the eve of another trial Jerry Morgan disappeared from Edgewood and was never heard of again. He could not face the trial for perjury.

About the same time Burt became a father and the measure of his happiness was full to overflowing. His law practice increased to such an extent that he was fast becoming rich.

Time wore on and in ten years he was a rich man with three children. He was elected to Congress. While in Washington Nannie died and he was left with three motherless children for his mother to take care of.

Two years later he was re-elected and sent back to Washington.

One day, while Speaking in the House, he saw Eunice Lofton in the gallery, her eyes riveted on his face. After the speech he sought her and found her a mature woman, beautiful and unmarried—an old maid—though but 30 years old.

"I am free," he said to her. "Are you also?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Will you come to me?"

"Yes."

"Go home then, and in two weeks I'll join you."

She returned to Edgewood and prepared for the wedding.

She had loved faithfully and waited long, refusing many offers in order to marry him who was "the only boy in the fire company," and the only one she ever loved.

THE END.

Read "LOST ON A RAFT; OR, DRIVEN FROM SEA TO SEA," by Captain Thos. H. Wilson, which will be the next number (422) of "Pluck and Luck."

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